

THE PRECARIOUS VOID OF EXTREMIST IDEOLOGY IN BANGLADESH:  
A PATH TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF  
MILITANT VIOLENCE

BY

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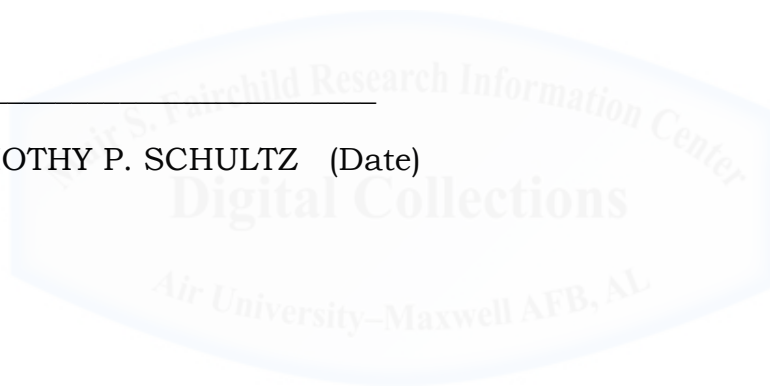
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## DISCLAIMER

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the US Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or Air University.



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## ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the current yet precarious void of extremist ideology in Bangladesh, the third largest Muslim-majority country. With a populace seemingly ripe for recruitment into extremist networks such as al-Qaeda, this study examines a few key factors that contribute to the relative stability and lack of militant Islamist or extremist ideology in Bangladesh today: democracy and governance, Bangladeshi cultural identity, and geography. At the strategic level, Bangladeshi cultural identity is the single greatest factor in combating violent extremism and quelling the tide of would-be Islamist movements in Bangladesh. Operationally, the government, through effective and democratic governance, has been successful in identifying, capturing, and killing key leaders of terrorist organizations, thus effectively marginalizing militant organizations and their ability to organize and conduct terrorist acts. In that regard, Bangladesh as a Muslim country is at odds with trends among other Muslim countries in Southeast Asia where the extremist agenda has become more apparent or prominent. Although there is a definite and growing threat of militancy and Islamist political activism in Bangladesh over the last decade, thus far it has not gained a strong foothold due in large part to democratic governance, empowered by a culturally aware and tolerant populace. Added to this, the geography of Bangladesh adds an element of security and protection from outside militant influences as well.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AF-PAK	Afghanistan – Pakistan
AL	Awami League
ASA	Association for Social Advancement
BEI	Bangladesh Enterprise Institute
BISS	Bangladesh Institute of International Security Studies
BIPSS	Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies
BNP	Bangladesh National Party
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
COMUSFOR-A	Commander, US Forces Afghanistan
GOB	Government of Bangladesh
HT	Hijbut Tahrir
Huji-B	Harkat-ul Jihad al Islami–Bangladesh
IC	Intelligence Community
JI	Jamaat-i-Islami
JMB	Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh
JP	Jatiya Party
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
USPACOM	United States Pacific Command



**Figure 1: Map of Bangladesh (Source: Source: Political Map of Bangladesh at [http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/bangladesh\\_map2.html](http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/bangladesh_map2.html))**

## INTRODUCTION

As one bomb blast after another went off around a confused 10-year-old Abdus Salam, he raced to grab his three-year-old brother Anik and made his way back to their modest house in Savar, in northern Dhaka. Unfortunately, childhood curiosity would overcome rational thought, and Abdus went back outside to see what was happening and perhaps make sense of the chaos around him. As he stood there, he noticed a small, paper-wrapped bundle in the courtyard near his home and foolishly picked it up. The small package, hardly the size of a pack of cigarettes, was a crude homemade bomb which, simply left alone on the ground, would not have the capacity to inflict any real damage within a two- or three-foot blast radius. In the tender hands of a 10-year old child, however, the improvised explosive device met its intended goal: to immolate a civilian and incite terror in the community.

Abdus Salam would die later that day in the hospital, the first casualty in an unprecedented series of terror attacks in Bangladesh on August 17th, 2005. That Wednesday, over 450 small bombs were timed to detonate within the span of 30 minutes in 63 of 64 districts in Bangladesh.<sup>1</sup> There were six bombs detonated in Savar alone, one of which killed young Abdus. The capital city of Dhaka bore the brunt of

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<sup>1</sup> *The Daily Star* article, "459 Blasts in 63 Districts in 30 Minutes," 18 August, 2005 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/2005/08/18/d5081801011.htm> (accessed on 20 March 2012).



the attacks, with over 50 bombs exploding near key government offices and other high profile locations such as the Supreme Court, the Prime Minister's office, the Dhaka judges court, Dhaka University, the Dhaka Sheraton Hotel, Zia International Airport, the Air Port rail station, a location close to the US embassy, police headquarters at Ramna, the Hotel Sonargaon, the Jatiya Press Club, New Market, and the Bangladesh Bank.<sup>2</sup>

That there was only one other casualty that day, a rickshaw driver in Chapainawabganj, was a testament to the amateurish and crudely fashioned nature of the devices. But while the devices themselves failed to make a larger impact, the sophistication behind the organization and planning of the attack left Bangladeshi citizens and the government alike reeling from panic and terror. In fact, it is quoted as being the seminal moment in Bangladesh's internal struggle with violent extremist ideology.<sup>3</sup>

Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), a militant group already banned in Bangladesh, claimed responsibility for the blasts through leaflets left near the bomb sites. The leaflets, in both Bangla and Arabic, stated that, "It is time to implement Islamic Law in Bangladesh. There is

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<sup>2</sup> *The Daily Star* article, "459 Bombs in 63 Districts in 30 Minutes."

<sup>3</sup> Author's interview with the former Bangladeshi Ambassador to the United States, Ambassador M. Humayun Kabir of the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute. Interviewed on 19 May, 2011 in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Mr. Jon Danilowicz, a senior State Department official at the U.S. Embassy, also echoed the sentiment, that this event marked the turning point for the GOB to make concerted efforts to take action against militant extremist groups in Bangladesh.



no future with man-made law,” while other leaflets purportedly claimed that “Bush and Blair be warned and get out of Muslim countries.”<sup>4</sup> JMB, outlawed earlier in February 2005 for suspected bombings against local Nongovernmental Organization (NGO) agencies, Grameen Bank and the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), was thought to have been working with another terrorist group, Harkat-Ul-Jihad-al-Islami-Bangladesh (Huji-B). The bombings targeted mainly courts and government offices, as both groups denounced Bangladesh’s secular legal system and pressed for the adoption of Islamic law.<sup>5</sup>

Terrorist activity in Bangladesh prior to 2005 had been sporadic, if not isolated, and often attributed to internal political violence as opposed to militant extremism. In fact, the ban of JMB six months before the multiple-bomb attack presented a major shift in the government of Bangladesh’s (GOB) policy, as the government had long insisted there was no threat from violent extremist ideology. After 17 August 2005, however, Bangladesh could no longer afford to live in denial of the growing threat of violent extremism and quickly arrested over 200 suspected militants thought to have been involved in this or earlier bombings.<sup>6</sup> The bombings on this day fundamentally altered Bangladesh’s outlook on militant extremism, engendered US national

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<sup>4</sup> BBC article, “Bombs Explode Across Bangladesh,” 17 August 2005 at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/4158478.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4158478.stm) (accessed on 20 March 2012).

<sup>5</sup> *The Daily Star* article, “459 Blasts in 63 Districts in 30 Minutes.”

<sup>6</sup> *The Daily Star* article, “459 Blasts in 63 Districts in 30 Minutes.”

security interests, and impelled a response to the demonstrated potential for significant terrorist activity in Bangladesh.

## **TOPIC BACKGROUND**

Ten years of war in Afghanistan has led to only a cursory understanding of the Muslim population in Afghanistan and the historically shared traits and characteristics of Muslims in neighboring Pakistan. To help combat this, then Commander, US Forces-Afghanistan (COMUSFOR-A), Gen David Petraeus, created a regional expertise training program, Af-Pak Hands (Afghanistan-Pakistan), focused on four pillars: culture, governance, development, and military, with the goal of understanding the identities of the region and how those identities shape the population's view of the outside world.<sup>7</sup> Regional expertise beyond Af-Pak Hands has become a national security imperative in a post-9/11 world, in which increased focus must be placed on all of South Asia. The region contains more than half the world's Muslim population within just four countries: Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh.<sup>8</sup>

These nations all adopted Islam through similar means and share many of the same common linear bonds, but have separate, distinct

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<sup>7</sup> Karen Parrish, "'Af-Pak Hands' Strives for Cultural Awareness," at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=63019> (accessed 23 May 2012).

<sup>8</sup> The author defines South Asia per the CIA's definition of what constitutes South Asia: Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Maldives. At [https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/wfbExt/region\\_sas.html](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/wfbExt/region_sas.html) (accessed 20 March 2012).

identities which have shaped their societies and cultures.<sup>9</sup> The Indian subcontinent's Muslim population shares a common heritage of a predominantly Sunni, as well as Wahhabi-based, Islamic orthodoxy.<sup>10</sup> It is important to note, however, that this Wahhabi-based orthodoxy is not to be confused with modern day, Saudi-influenced, "Wahhabiism."<sup>11</sup> Instead, the original Wahhabi orthodoxy was infused with teachings from various local Sufi saints and took its foundations as a result of complex interaction with Persian and Arabic culture.<sup>12</sup>

Both West and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) shared this common Islamic heritage, and both were influenced by, many of the same early theologians and scholars such as Haji Shariatullah (1781-1840), who, after travelling to Mecca, came back to the subcontinent and helped spread the Wahhabi theology there.<sup>13</sup> Another early advocate, Abu al-A'la Mawdudi, was born in India in 1906 and wrote extensively on Islamist theology. He led a campaign to create an Islamic nation within the confines of India, as opposed to the prevalent, post-colonial concept of nationalizing Islam in the form of West and East Pakistan.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204 – 1760*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993.

<sup>10</sup> Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204 – 1760*, 38.

<sup>11</sup> Modern-day Saudi "Wahhabiism" is defined as a more fundamental and rigid form of Islam.

<sup>12</sup> Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204 – 1760*, 40.

<sup>13</sup> Hiranmay Karlekar, *Bangladesh: The Next Afghanistan?*, (New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2005), 29.

<sup>14</sup> L. Carl Brown, "Religion and State, The Muslim Approach to Politics," New York, Columbia University Press, 2000, 150.

Understanding South Asian societies today, and their views towards the US and the West, is a crucial part of President Obama's 2010 National Security Strategy which advocates combating extremism and maintaining international order through the promotion of democratic principles.<sup>15</sup> Specifically, the US needs to understand whether South Asia's similar Islamic bonds are analogous to their views on extremism, or if the varying cultural and societal rifts provide a buffer from violent extremist views. Additionally, the US must also determine the strength of Bangladesh's viability and the likelihood it will remain stable or fracture into a radicalized, failed state.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The obvious implications of a failed Bangladesh state is that it may spawn, train, or harbor extremist militant groups or otherwise become an incubator for violent ideology. The US must understand all of South Asia's complexities if an effective campaign against violent extremism in the region is to be successful. Furthermore, a robust intelligence capability, coupled with an analysis of historical context, will facilitate a more effective use of limited resources and capabilities in the fight against extremism. But it is not only the US that is keenly aware of the perilous potential of Bangladesh. India and China are also carefully

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<sup>15</sup> Whitehouse.gov, "National Security Strategy, May 2010," [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss\\_viewer/national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf) (accessed 18 October 2011), 17.

watching the destiny of Bangladesh, for Bangladesh holds the key to the reestablishment of a long-dormant historical trade route between the two rising hegemons of the twenty-first century.

The strategic implications of Bangladesh's vulnerabilities include increased transnational threats to both India and the greater international community. Currently, the Afghanistan-Pakistan border represents a center of gravity for Taliban fighters, Pashtun insurgent groups, and various other militants operating in the border regions of eastern Afghanistan/western Pakistan. In his March 2009 speech on "A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan," President Obama called for an increased commitment of US manpower and material resources in order to provide greater intelligence in the border regions, and also referred to the India-Pakistan border as a potential source of future tensions that may exacerbate existing security risks in the war against extremism.<sup>16</sup>

This same analogy may be applied to the border region between Bangladesh and India, which lays claim to similarly porous terrain that allows for the potential flow of weapons and militants between Bangladesh and India. A US State Department official cites this border region between India and Bangladesh as having the potential to be

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<sup>16</sup> President Barack H. Obama, "Remarks by the President on a New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan," 27 March 2009, at [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_pres\\_office/remarks-by-the-president-on-a-new-strategy-for-afghanistan-and-pakistan](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_pres_office/remarks-by-the-president-on-a-new-strategy-for-afghanistan-and-pakistan) (accessed 5 December 2011).

equally central to the insurgency efforts against US interests, if proper attention is not given to its threat analysis.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, an evaluation must be made of the emerging internal threats in Bangladesh. This would facilitate US support and aid to Bangladesh by ensuring bilateral initiatives are rooted in a concrete understanding and appreciation of the social, political, and economic challenges that affect the stability of the populace.

To that end, USAID representatives in Bangladesh have initiated critical Counterterrorism and Madrasa baseline education reform initiatives using Department of Defense-procured dollars.<sup>18</sup> Yet the distinction must be made as to the current level of violent extremist ideology that exists in Bangladesh and whether that violence is merely a function of criminal activity, corruption, or ideology. While some would argue that militant groups such as JMB are the flagship of radical elements in Bangladesh that reject Bangladesh as an entity and seek to establish a caliphate-ruled, Shariah-based provincial structure, the United States needs to temper that analysis with further research and

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<sup>17</sup> Author's interview with U.S. State Department's South Asia officials on 28 April 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Ms. Meghan W.T. Nalbo, USAID representative at the U.S. Embassy, Dhaka, Bangladesh. She stated that USAID is using Department of Defense 1207 money to fund two projects, a local police training facility in Rajshahi, Bangladesh, as well as education reform initiatives targeted at the many unregulated Madrasas in Bangladesh's rural communities. Interview was conducted on 18 May 2011.

study into the origins, history, and underpinnings of such ideology in Bangladeshi society.<sup>19</sup>

This study begins that dialogue through an analysis of past terrorist activity and provides a more nuanced approach to examining what factors are most responsible for the current void of violent extremist ideology in Bangladesh.

### **USE OF TERMINOLOGY**

Words matter. So begins the January 2008 Department of Homeland Security memorandum titled “Terminology to Define the Terrorists: Recommendations from American Muslims.”<sup>20</sup> Indeed words do matter, but not necessarily from the standpoint of appeasing either of the two polar viewpoints that shape the post-9/11 discourse of US national security and terrorism. One viewpoint labels and defines Islam as the problem and the fundamental determining factor behind terrorism. As the famed political scientist Samuel Huntington noted, “The fundamental problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the

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<sup>19</sup> Maneeza Hossain, “Broken Pendulum, Bangladesh’s Swing to Radicalism,” Hudson Institute Inc, 2007, 28.

<sup>20</sup> Department of Homeland Security, Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, “Terminology to Define the Terrorists: Recommendations from American Muslims,” January 2008 at [http://www.dhs.gov/xabout/structure/gc\\_1212591972165.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/xabout/structure/gc_1212591972165.shtm) (accessed 22 March 2012).

inferiority of their power.”<sup>21</sup> This argument presents two distinct problems. The first mistakenly views Islam as a monolithic religion without room for the infusion of cultural mores. The second problem relies on a narrow reading and even narrower understanding of Islamic texts, specifically focusing on those verses and passages dealing with war and strife. Another, equally counterproductive viewpoint espoused by many in the Muslim community, is that Islam is simply a religion of peace and nonviolence, thereby negating any historical context through which Islamic tradition was adopted and spread.

Both positions fail to understand and properly articulate that using Islam as the basis for the narrative on terrorism presumes Islam to be a universally monolithic religion, which it is not. Widely accepted terms such as Islamism, are often used to define organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood or in its broadest sense, a neologism where Islam is the basis for political ideology. But this fails to take into consideration individual motivations, cultural and doctrinal differences, as well the most basic distinctions between Sunni and Shiite traditions. Specifically, the idiosyncrasies of local culture, religion, and socio-economic factors are negated in deference to a Near Eastern model of Islam where authority is based in Arab culture. Bangladesh’s identity as an Islamic nation particularly belies

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<sup>21</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1996) 217.



this terminology, as its practice of Islamic tradition is heavily infused with Sufism as well as local customs and practices.<sup>22</sup>

The current terrorism verbiage in the general media's national security dialogue includes the following terms: Islam, Islamism, Fundamentalism, Jihadist, Mujahidin, Caliphate, and Sharia.

- *Islam*: A centuries old faith, the adherents of which are Muslims. Fundamental to the core of being a Muslim and practicing Islam is the belief in one God, Allah, and Muhammad as his last prophet.<sup>23</sup> Beyond that, even while preserving strong and common religious bonds across diverse societies, Muslims have lived their faith in a variety of ways as a function of time and space. This plural Islam is dominant today as there are over 1.5 billion Muslims in the world, with various subdivisions, from the main sects of Sunni and Shiite to diversity in doctrine, practice, and belief, such as Sufi orders.<sup>24</sup>
- *Islamism*: A spectrum of political propositions rooted in particular readings of Islamic texts and intellectual heritage.<sup>25</sup> Claims that the legitimacy of the political order ought to be derived from Islam. Islamism postulates that the very validity of the political system is ultimately determined by its conformity or adherence to an ideal notion of Islam, an often ahistorical account with significant departures from Islam as practiced in

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<sup>22</sup> Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204 – 1760*.

<sup>23</sup> Yousseff H. Aboul-Enein, *Militant Islamist Ideology, Understanding the Global Threat*, (Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 2010) 2.

<sup>24</sup> Hassan Mneimneh, "Islam, Islamism, and the Need for Clarity," American Enterprise Institute critical Threats Brief at <http://www.criticalthreats.org/islam-islamism-and-need-clarity-terminology> (accessed 20 March 2012).

<sup>25</sup> Mneimneh, "Islam, Islamism, and the Need for Clarity."

Muslim societies.<sup>26</sup> Islamism is to Muslims what Communism once was to large swaths of blue-collar workers in society.<sup>27</sup> Thus, both Communism and Islamism claim to represent the essence and interests of their respective population, irrespective of the actual sentiments of the people.

- *Fundamentalism*: Literally defined as “return to fundamentals,” this term adds a layer of unnecessary complexity when linked with Islam, because Islam has always been characterized by the observance of fundamental principles.<sup>28</sup> While other religious traditions and beliefs have undergone reinterpretations and modifications, Islamic tradition has largely attempted to remain committed to its fundamental, or core, principles over centuries. In that light, all Muslims may be classified as fundamentalists who value the static nature of Islam as an ideal for individuals and societies, as well as a perception of the actual nature of humanity and its environment.<sup>29</sup>
- *Jihadist*: The use of force employed by Islamist movements as well as the belief that this use of force is legitimate, regardless of whether it is deemed permissible or obligatory. For Islamist organizations, jihadism is thought to be the functional equivalent of guerilla warfare.<sup>30</sup> In the Islamic tradition, Jihad simply means striving, a call from God for all Muslims to “strive in the path of God”, or *jihad fi sabil illah*. There are two separate categories of jihad, greater jihad – the personal struggle for Muslims to enjoin good and forbid evil in their daily

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<sup>26</sup> Aboul-Enein, *Militant Islamist Ideology, Understanding the Global Threat*.

<sup>27</sup> Mneimneh, “Islam, Islamism, and the Need for Clarity.”

<sup>28</sup> Ali Riaz, *God Willing, The Politics of Islamism in Bangladesh*, (Oxford, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2004) 13.

<sup>29</sup> William M. Watt, *Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity*, (London, Routledge, 1988), 3.

<sup>30</sup> Hassan Mneimneh, “Jihadism,” American Enterprise Institute critical Threats Brief at <http://www.criticalthreats.org/jihadism> (accessed 20 March 2012).

lives, as well as lesser jihad – actual fighting or violence in defense of Islamic principles.

- *Mujahidin*: Participants in jihad, specifically, lesser jihad, or warfare. Frequently translated as “holy warrior,” engaged in a struggle against an enemy. The term Mujahidin gained widespread exposure and prominence during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, referring to the warriors who resisted the invasion and ultimately prevailed.<sup>31</sup>
- *Caliphate*: The successors of the Prophet Muhammad as the political leaders of the Muslim community. The third of three tenets in Islamist political discourse: (1) *Al-Islam huwa al-hall* (Islam is the solution), (2) *tatbiq al shari’a* (implementation of shariah law), and (3) *iqamat al-Khilafah* (establishment of the caliphate).<sup>32</sup> While widely espoused as the ideological doctrine of al-Qaeda, the latter two tenets regarding shari’a law and the caliphate are largely slogans of an indefinite endgame which, secularly defined, applies to the modern era, but is understood in Islamic theology to mean an indefinite timeline, thus having little bearing on modern day society.
- *Sharia*: Commonly taken to mean “Islamic law,” Sharia literally translates to “path” in Arabic. Sharia influences the legal code in most Muslim countries and is designed to help guide all aspects of Muslim life including daily routines, familial and religious obligations, and financial dealings. It is derived primarily from the Quran and the Sunna (the sayings, practices, and teachings of the Prophet Mohammed). Precedents and

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<sup>31</sup> Douglas E. Streusand and LTC Harry Tunnell IV, “Choosing Words carefully: Language to Help Fight Islamic Terrorism,” National Defense University at [www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/ndu/choosing\\_words\\_carefully.pdf](http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/ndu/choosing_words_carefully.pdf) (accessed 20 March 2012).

<sup>32</sup> Hassan Mneimneh, “The Islamist State: An Attempt at Depicting the endgame of Islamism,” American Enterprise Institute critical Threats Brief at <http://www.criticalthreats.org/the-islamist-state-an-attempt-at-depicting-the-endgame-of-islamism> (accessed 10 March 2012).

analogy applied by Muslim scholars are used to address new issues. The consensus of the Muslim community also plays a role in defining this theological manual. Sharia developed several hundred years after the Prophet Mohammed's death in 632 CE as the Islamic empire expanded to the edge of North Africa in the West and to China in the East.<sup>33</sup>

The argument against using this terminology is that it gives legitimacy to the terrorists and actually helps their cause by inflating the religious basis of their ideology and glamorizing their struggle.<sup>34</sup> Other scholars argue that Islamist, or even militant Islamist, is exactly the definition of those who wish to do us harm, the adversary.<sup>35</sup> Instead, these terms too narrowly restrict one's ability to analyze terrorist activity with objectivity and without regard for phenomenology.<sup>36</sup>

"Militant extremism" is a more appropriate term for terrorist activity since it captures the violent nature of the acts and also allows for objective analysis of individual motivations for terrorism as a human phenomenon. Couched in those terms, acts of terrorism are better understood through a phenomenological perspective, taking into

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<sup>33</sup> Council of Foreign Relations, "Islam, Governing Under Sharia," at <http://www.cfr.org/religion/islam-governing-under-sharia/p8034> (accessed 18 March 2012).

<sup>34</sup> Department of Homeland Security, Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, "Terminology to Define the Terrorists: Recommendations from American Muslims."

<sup>35</sup> Aboul-Enein, *Militant Islamist Ideology, Understanding the Global Threat*.

<sup>36</sup> The term phenomenology is used in this thesis as defined by Merriam Webster's dictionary: a philosophical movement that describes the formal structure of the objects of awareness and of awareness itself in abstraction from any claims concerning existence.

consideration reaction to stimuli, relative depravation theories, or prompted by an ideological view of their reality. Militant extremism better defines the acts of violence perpetrated on civilian populations without regard for religion, ethnicity, gender, and without reducing the intricacies of the act and dismissing it as being a product of a monolithic “Islam.” Instead, Islam for militant extremists today is an ideology rather than the complexity of a 1,400-year old religious tradition and the various civilizations which are a part of it.

This study, therefore, approaches extremism found in Bangladesh as *militant extremism* which can be analyzed and researched as phenomenon informed by local, contextual experience as opposed to directly reflecting Islamist ideological doctrine.

### **RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESES**

What explains the current absence of militant extremism in Bangladesh, and can that model be exported to other states as a stabilizing force? If there are multiple explanatory factors, which one dominates? Given the similar lineage and demographics of neighboring Pakistan and nearby Afghanistan, why has Bangladesh been successful in quelling violent extremism within its borders? Is it a function of democracy, culture, or geography that has been the most influential dynamic behind Bangladesh’s success thus far?

Key factors that serve to address the main research question include the current levels of extremism found in Bangladesh, the strengths and weaknesses of democracy and democratic institutions in Bangladesh today, the relationship between culture and Islam in Bangladesh, the definition of Bangladeshi culture, national security concerns for Bangladesh, who the terrorist organizations are and what terrorist acts have taken place, and the stabilizing forces to counter this activity.

### **Hypotheses**

There are two main hypotheses tested in this study. The first asserts that Bangladesh's functioning democracy and strong democratic institutions, such as the judiciary and open press, are the main factors behind its success at checking militant extremist behavior. The second asserts that Bangladesh's cultural identity does not overshadow, but rather enhances its strong Islamic identity and is also a significant contributor to the low levels of extremism found today.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

Having identified the research question and hypotheses, this study begins by reviewing the existing body of scholarship on the level and history of militant extremism in Bangladesh. Conceding that there is a

dearth of information on the topic, this study has proposed its own research questions and hypothesis. Data collection includes relying on previous studies, independent books, scholarly journals, periodicals, open source government documents, and other literary works on the subject. Due to the overall lack of published works on extremism in Bangladesh, in-field research was conducted through personal interviews in order to provide primary sources of knowledge on the subject.

To that end, this study employs a qualitative, exploratory methodology using a mixed design method of available data and surveys, a comparative case study, phenomenology, as well as structured topic exploration.

### **SAMPLE DESIGN**

To understand and appreciate the phenomenology behind extremism in Bangladesh, in-field interviews were conducted in May 2011. These interviews built upon earlier ethnographic studies from existing literature examining the salient traits of the Bangladeshi people and society from its early days as West Bengal, through British colonization, to the formation of East Pakistan, independence in 1971, and, finally, to modern society. The interviews produced a wealth of qualitative data from both US State Department officials as well as Bangladeshi nationals living and working in Bangladesh. This data was

then used to assess the current levels of extremism found in 2012 and forecast the future of Bangladeshi extremism.

This study uses a purposive sampling design for interviews.<sup>37</sup> Starting with US State Department officials who were knowledgeable on Bangladeshi extremism, I specifically sought out Bengali nationals that could offer insight into extremism in Bangladesh. The alternative would be to simply ask a random sampling of Bangladeshi nationals whom I met throughout my research period and ask them for their opinion on Bangladeshi extremism. Instead, I focused on Bangladeshis who were in positions in which they had already provided their thoughts and knowledge to scholarly journals and publications on the topic.

I initially started off with expert sampling of US Embassy officials and senior leadership at various Bangladeshi think tanks who have dealt with extremism in Bangladesh.<sup>38</sup> At the conclusion of each of those interviews, I solicited recommendations for other individuals that could also provide value-added input to the study. Using this snowball method of sampling, I was able to widen the aperture to include a myriad of

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<sup>37</sup> William M.K. Trochim, Research Methods Knowledge Base at <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/samprn.php> (accessed 3 October 2011). Purposive sampling design focuses research on a sampling of specific sources relevant to the study, as opposed to a general sampling that seeks to get a sample of the general views on the subject.

<sup>38</sup> Trochim, Research Methods Knowledge Base.



individuals from academia, journalism, and the Bangladesh military, all to the benefit of the study.<sup>39</sup>

As a precursor to in-field research, I initially interviewed US State Department officials at the US State Department, Washington D.C. I also interviewed various Bangladeshi expats living in the United States who could offer insight into questions ranging from simply, “Did you leave Bangladesh because of the threat from any militant extremism?” (the answer always being a resounding, “No”) to their opinions on Bangladesh society in general and the level of extremism in Bangladesh today. Their experiences and opinions, as members of the culture, formulated a baseline for what members of the US community felt about the status of Bangladesh civil society, governance, and extremism. Additionally, I interviewed Bangladeshi military officers currently assigned as international officers to US Air Force developmental education schools such as the Air War College, the Air Command and Staff College, and the Squadron Officer School in the spring of 2012.

Using this baseline, I then conducted both personal and telephonic interviews in Bangladesh of two sets of groups: US Embassy officials in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Bangladeshi nationals in various organizations, from academia, think tanks, military, and NGOs. Specifically, in the US Embassy, I interviewed the Defense Attaché Officer, USAID

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<sup>39</sup> Trochim, Research Methods Knowledge Base.

representatives, US Department of Justice officials, and the Senior Counselor for Political and Economic Affairs. Interviews with Bangladeshi nationals included:<sup>40</sup>

#### Bangladesh Think Tanks

- Senior Official, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI)
- Senior Research Director, BEI
- Senior Official, Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS)
- Senior Staff, BIPSS
- Research Staff, Bangladesh Institute of International and Security Studies (BISS)

#### Bangladesh Military

- Bangladesh Army Intelligence Officer
- Senior Official, Ansar and Village Defense Forces, Bangladesh

#### Bangladesh NGOs

- Senior Official, BRAC (NGO)
- Senior Official and Academic Professor, BRAC University

#### Bangladeshi Academics

- Author and Scholar on Bangladeshi Extremism

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<sup>40</sup> In the interest of providing the greatest level of anonymity possible, while still identifying respective organizations, I have elected to use “Senior Official” as the title for high-level interviewees. Admittedly, a correlation could still be made for who top level officials were for the time period of this research, but this method of labeling allows for a slightly increased degree of ambiguity by not using their official titles. It is worth noting that when asked if there was any sensitivity to releasing their names in my study, almost all respondents affirmed their consent to cite them by name.

- Author and Scholar on Middle East Studies and Extremism
- Senior Official, Bangladesh Youth Leadership Council

Bangladeshi Journalists

- Special Correspondent, The Daily Prothom Alo
- Senior Current Affairs Editor, Bangladesh Independent TV

Additionally, I was able to attend a USPACOM Threat Vulnerability Assessment briefing given to then US Ambassador James F. Moriarty, which proved invaluable as it provided access to a March 2011 “Vulnerable Population Survey (Rajshahi Division)” conducted by The Nielson Company, Bangladesh.<sup>41</sup> And finally, in-field research in Dhaka, Bangladesh included two trips to Madrasas, located in Savar, Bangladesh and Shirajgonj, Bangladesh, where I was able to interview local imams and instructors on curriculum and Islamic doctrine being taught.

## **ANALYTICAL DESIGN**

This study tests the hypotheses through a case study of Bangladesh. The study also includes a cursory case study of Pakistan in an effort to provide a comparative historical analysis of Pakistan and Bangladesh. It also researches the ethnography of Bangladesh,

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<sup>41</sup> “Vulnerable Population Survey (Rajshahi group),” March 2011, conducted by The Nielson Company, Bangladesh. The report was briefed to U.S. Ambassador James Moriarty on 18 May, 2011 by USPACOM representatives from the U.S. Embassy Dhaka. (See appendix B)

Pakistan, and Afghanistan to determine the cultural shifts and identity of the ethnicities. The hypotheses lend themselves to inductive reasoning – to disprove the idea that since extremists in Afghanistan are Muslims, therefore, all Muslims are extremists. The aim of the analysis is to show a correlation, not necessarily causality, between governance and culture and Bangladesh's lack of extremism. The study also utilizes bricolage, the processes by which people acquire cultural norms and behaviors from across social divisions to create new cultural identities, in studying Bangladeshi culture to determine what comprises their specific identity.<sup>42</sup>

Analysis of phenomenology is also used through observation of Madrasa training and student behavior. In addition to visiting local Madrasas, I was able to interview the director of the Bangladesh Youth Leadership Council, which brings together high school students from a broad spectrum of socio-economic backgrounds, including both privileged Dhaka youth and rural students educated through the Bangladesh Madrasa education system. I was able to observe student interaction and also posed questions of the director on levels of aptitude,

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<sup>42</sup> Definition of bricolage from Wikipedia at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bricolage> (accessed 20 Jun 2011).

potential disenfranchisement, and future outlook of Madrasa students.<sup>43</sup>

Organizing all of these interviews required defining and utilizing a *unit of analysis* methodology.<sup>44</sup> The unit of analysis, the major entity analyzed in this study, was deemed to be the individual assessments and opinions of interviewees, as well as qualitative, anthropological models of population behavior. The latter consisted of research and analysis of the difference between societies and civilizations that developed in mountainous or hilly terrain (i.e. Pakistan and Afghanistan) and those that inhabited plains and low-lying geography (Bangladesh). This anthropological, qualitative analysis emphasizes the importance of observation, the need to retain the phenomenological quality of the evaluation context, and the value of subjective human interpretation in the evaluation process.<sup>45</sup>

To understand the phenomenology, one must first understand the historical context of how Bangladesh came into existence and its roots within South Asia. The following chapter outlines that history in relation to the larger subcontinent of South Asia.

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<sup>43</sup> Interview conducted on 21 May, 2011 of Mr. Ejaj Hamid, Director, Bangladesh Youth Leadership Council. When asked whether Madrasa students exhibited the same levels of proficiency as other students in Bangladesh, he identified the distinction between those students educated in Alia, or government-run Madrasa and Qaumi, or private sector Madrasa. Generally, Ali Madrasas have a more organized and standard curriculum, whereas the Qaumi Madrasas are unregulated and vary in depth of academic rigor and credibility.

<sup>44</sup> William M.K. Trochim, Research Methods Knowledge Base at <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/index.php> (accessed 30 May 2011). Unit of analysis used in this study is the Bangladeshi population and its behavior with respect to the three areas of study; government, culture, and geography.

<sup>45</sup> Trochim, Research Methods Knowledge Base.

## CHAPTER 1

### HISTORY AS PREHISTORY

The preponderance of current literature on Bangladesh predominantly relates to its general history, its status as a third-world (or developing) nation, or even the many catastrophic natural disasters it has endured over the years. There exists only limited scholarly works examining Bangladeshi extremism and even fewer that analyze the underpinnings for that extremism.<sup>1</sup> As a democratic society, with a staunchly open press, this dearth of literature is best explained by the overall minimal terrorist activity that has taken place thus far, as opposed to any apprehension to reporting on such events. As noted previously, most occurrences of violence in Bangladesh's history were simply attributed to political violence that seemingly came with the dysfunctional, dynastic, and zero-sum nature of politics of Bangladesh. Essentially, little research or analysis exists regarding militant extremism in Bangladesh.

It was not until the late 1990s that Bangladesh began to take notice of increased outbursts of extremist violence and terrorism, with the first major event occurring in March 1999, when bomb explosions at a cultural function in the Jessore district left 10 people dead and over

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the literature that deals with extremism in Bangladesh has been authored by Bangladeshi think tanks such as the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, the Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies, or the Bangladesh Institute of International and Security Studies. They have authored such books as *Countering Terrorism in Bangladesh*, *Trends in Militancy in Bangladesh*, as well as *Bangladesh, A New Nation in an Old Setting*. Other literature is in the form of reports, essays, and articles from Bangladeshi authors for international publications and US think tanks such as the Hudson Institute.

100 injured.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, much of the cited literature regarding militant extremism in Bangladesh has been published in the 21st century. But to understand the underlying origins of this surge in terrorist activity, to accurately gauge that level and examine the link to democracy, culture, or geography, one must first have a sound appreciation of Bangladesh's history, demographics, and the societal landscape. As such, this chapter is organized under five headings: history, governance, culture, geography, and militant organizations.

### **A BRIEF HISTORY OF BANGLADESH**

Ruled as a British colony since the 16th century, post-colonial Bangladesh traces its modern roots back to 1906, under its first national state with a native populace within defined geographic borders: East Bengal. Still entirely within the rule and legal authority of the British Empire, East Bengal was intended to be a territorial partition of a predominantly majority Muslim population, autonomous from Hindu rule, which the British hoped would reciprocate with favorable access to critical ports and trade routes.<sup>3</sup> However, the rest of India's mainly Hindu population became incensed at the partition and staged riots and even killed British officers in an effort to return East Bengal to its past with India, which the British eventually did in 1911.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Y.M. Bammi, *India Bangladesh Relations, The Way Ahead*, (New Delhi, Vij Books India Ltd, 2010) 227.

<sup>3</sup> Hiranmay Karlekar, *Bangladesh: The Next Afghanistan?*, (New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2005), 33.

<sup>4</sup> Karlekar, *Bangladesh: The Next Afghanistan?*, 35.

The area, still loosely referred to as East Bengal, remained as such until 1947 when British rule of the Indian subcontinent came to an end. At the time, British mandates called for geographic boundaries according to religion, which created West Pakistan, India, and East Bengal.<sup>5</sup> East Bengal was subsumed under West Pakistan as one, albeit geographically separated, country, and eventually changed its name to East Pakistan in 1955.<sup>6</sup>

Rule by the West Pakistan government resulted in exploitation of Bengali resources and productivity similar to British rule. Separated by 1600 km, West Pakistan housed the central government, all governmental offices, military apparatus, educational institutions, and most employment opportunities. Even taxes raised in East Pakistan were seemingly only distributed in, and benefitted, West Pakistan.<sup>7</sup> Bangladesh was marginalized in all aspects of socio-economic development and leadership, creating a status quo similar to that of a colonial ruler and its colony. Added to this, the core identity of the Muslim populace in Bangladesh was different than their West Pakistani counterparts.<sup>8</sup> Pakistan, unlike Bangladesh, had few cultural elements on which to build a national identity; therefore, at its inception, it sought to impose a new identity from the top down with little attention paid to

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<sup>5</sup> Charles O'Donnell, *Bangladesh, Biography of a Muslim Nation*, (Boulder, Westview Press, 1984).

<sup>6</sup> Karlekar, *Bangladesh: The Next Afghanistan?*

<sup>7</sup> Karlekar, *Bangladesh: The Next Afghanistan?*, 18.

<sup>8</sup> Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204 – 1760*.



how this national identity would be integrated and synthesized within an already defined national ideal. This approach ultimately proved to be a failure and led to the 1971 War of Liberation.<sup>9</sup>

The Indian subcontinent's Muslim population shared a common heritage, that of conversion to a predominantly Sunni and Wahhabi-based Islamic orthodoxy. Both West and East Pakistan shared this common Islamic heritage and originally followed a basic form of Wahhabi theology.<sup>10</sup> However, the similarities end there.

East Bengal, as a subculture in predominantly Hindu Eastern India, increasingly saw large infusions of Sufism merge with its fundamental Islamic principles and practice. Added to that, the culture of East Bengalis was wholly different and separate from that of West Pakistan. Fundamental to its culture was the language of Bangla, which is a derivative of the Indo-Aryan based Sanskrit, and substantially different from West Pakistan's language of Urdu, also of Indo-Aryan origin, but containing more Persian influences.<sup>11</sup> Equally significant to the culture of East Bengal was a predilection towards democracy and governance.

As early as 1906, in the newly created East Bengal, democratic governance was seen as the key to future prosperity. Rule by the Muslim

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<sup>9</sup> Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204 – 1760*.

<sup>10</sup> Karlekar, "Bangladesh: The Next Afghanistan?", 29.

<sup>11</sup> Karlekar, "Bangladesh: The Next Afghanistan?", 32.

League emerged early on as a cohesive political force.<sup>12</sup> When East Bengal ceased to exist in 1911, the Muslim League managed to keep much of its control and influence within the looser confines of East Bengal, all the way to the creation of West Pakistan, where the Muslim League was again put into power, albeit with more Urdu-speaking, West Pakistani government officials.<sup>13</sup> This new government was fragile at best, and quickly fell under heavy military influence. The Muslim League treated East Pakistan as if it were simply a colony of West Pakistan.

All of these reasons predicated the decision by East Pakistan to call for independence in 1971 through the War of Liberation which resulted in the creation of Bangladesh. Bangladesh's very inception, then, is based on nationalism through cultural identity, as opposed to West Pakistan's nationalism through Islamic identity. This is a key distinction, as Bangladesh finds itself at a crossroad in a post-9/11 environment where there is a definite and potentially growing emergence of ideologically-based extremist movements designed to undermine the daily governance and life of Bangladeshi citizenry.

## **BANGLADESH GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS**

Although Bangladesh did not support a sustained democratic system until 1991, Bangladeshis have had a largely successful history of

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<sup>12</sup> The Muslim League was a democratic form of government for East Bengal. It was allowed by the British colonialists in order to provide a legitimate conduit to the Muslim peoples of East Bengal.

<sup>13</sup> Karlekar, "Bangladesh: The Next Afghanistan?", 38.

democratic rule, starting in East Bengal with the Muslim League in 1906.<sup>14</sup> East Bengal, and now Bangladesh, benefitted from existing and intact institutions from the British Raj. Their educated elite created a functioning bureaucracy and infrastructure in the region, all of which West Pakistan lacked. This aided the continuation of democracy in what later became Bangladesh.

After the War of Liberation in 1971, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, leader of the Awami League and a staunch secularist, was the first elected leader and ruled Bangladesh as a secular state, recognizing in the constitution only “nationalism,” “socialism,” “democracy,” and “secularism” as principles of state policy.<sup>15</sup> But as a young, immature, and fledgling democracy, it did not take long before his leadership was contested, and after numerous years of wrangling between warring political parties, military rule took hold in 1975 under Maj Gen Ziaur (Zia) Rahman (no relation), who eventually made himself president in 1977.<sup>16</sup> Under his presidency, Islam began to take a more prominent role in the public life of Bangladeshis. Zia Rahman accomplished this through numerous constitutional amendments, starting with the inclusion of the Arabic verse ‘Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim’ (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) at the beginning of the

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<sup>14</sup> Karlekar, *Bangladesh: The Next Afghanistan?*, 12.

<sup>15</sup> Karlekar, *Bangladesh: The Next Afghanistan?*, 48.

<sup>16</sup> Karlekar, *Bangladesh: The Next Afghanistan?*, 52.

preamble.<sup>17</sup> He also removed secularism from among the principles of state policy and inserted “the principle of absolute trust and faith in the almighty Allah, nationalism, democracy, and socialism...shall constitute the fundamental principles of state policy.”<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Zia lifted the ban on religious political parties, thus opening the door for an Islamist role in the governmental realm.<sup>19</sup>

Following Zia, another military coup led by General Hussain Ershad went even further and declared Islam the state religion in 1982, as if to prove the general’s own religious credentials. These military regimes, from 1975 to 1991, set the stage for modern Islamist movements as they pursued policies of Islamization in order to gain political legitimacy.<sup>20</sup> They also widened the political playing field from a two-party system, comprised of the Awami League and the Bangladesh National Party (BNP), to include a new Islamist political movement, the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI). The Awami League, heir to the founder of the nation, is generally regarded as left-of-center, and posits itself as a secular party. BNP takes Zia’s presidency as its model, and is right-of-center, maintaining that Bengali heritage and the Islamic contribution

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<sup>17</sup> Ali Riaz, “‘God Willing’: The Politics and Ideology of Islamism in Bangladesh,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, Vol. 23, Nos. 1-2 (2003), 310-312 at <http://www.cssaame.com/issues/23/34.pdf> (Accessed 20 March 2012).

<sup>18</sup> Karlekar, *Bangladesh: The Next Afghanistan?*, 51.

<sup>19</sup> Hossain and Curtis, “Bangladesh: Checking Islamist Extremism in a Pivotal Democracy,” 2.

<sup>20</sup> Riaz, “‘God Willing’: The Politics and Ideology of Islamism in Bangladesh,” 312.

exist in a stable equilibrium.<sup>21</sup> Jamaati-Islami's goal is to establish an Islamic state and has partnered itself with the BNP at times to gain legitimacy. By doing so, made inroads into parliament, securing 17 of 300 seats, while the BNP was in power from 2001 – 2006 (in 2012, Jamaati-Islami is down to two seats).

Islamist ideology in Bangladesh has maintained a weaker foothold and a less influential role than their counterparts in Pakistan. Even during the period when there was a unified East and West Pakistan, Islamist parties were relegated to the fringes of political debate and governance.<sup>22</sup> This was especially true in East Pakistan, where they had little support before the War of Liberation and even less after. Islamist support of Pakistan and rejection of Bengali independence during the war destroyed their credibility with the voting public. Furthermore, some Islamist leaders were accused of complicity in the savage treatment of Bengalis by the Pakistani army, further marginalizing their credentials to lead Bangladesh as an Islamic state.<sup>23</sup>

Bangladesh's return to democracy in 1991 was a welcome development, but the very nature of Bangladeshi politics, fraught with corruption and bitter warring between parties, now shifted focus from

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<sup>21</sup> Maneeza Hossain, "The Road to a Sharia State? Cultural Radicalization in Bangladesh." *Hudson Institute White Paper*, November 2006, 8.

<sup>22</sup> William B. Milam, *Bangladesh and Pakistan, Flirting with Failure in South Asia*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 2009) 236.

<sup>23</sup> Milam, *Bangladesh and Pakistan, Flirting with Failure in South Asia*.

pure party politics and secular ideals to create space for political Islam as a form of political expediency. One is unlikely to win an election in Bangladesh today without addressing, and pandering to, the religious right. While moderation and religious tolerance remain defining features of Bangladeshi politics, the secular discourse and ideals upon which Bangladesh was founded in 1971 have been diluted.<sup>24</sup> Democracy's eroding credibility between 1991 and 2005 was characterized by the failings of a two-party system, where both parties espoused electoral democracy but suffered from rampant and endemic corruption. This created an atmosphere of political apathy and effectively opened the door for extremism. With secularism and nationalism relegated to the background, and democracy undermined by severe corruption, extremism took root and resulted with the bombings in August and November of 2005.

On January 11, 2007, the Bangladesh military intervened once again in a precarious democratic process, effectively removing Bangladesh from the list of recognized democracies. One more Muslim country seemed to be headed down the road of prolonged autocratic rule, and perhaps down the road to a failed state.<sup>25</sup> This military coup, however, did not have as a stated goal establishment of military rule. Instead, its intent was to fight political corruption and the rise of Islamist

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<sup>24</sup> Hossain and Curtis, "Bangladesh: Checking Islamist Extremism in a Pivotal Democracy," 2.

<sup>25</sup> Hossain and Curtis, "Bangladesh: Checking Islamist Extremism in a Pivotal Democracy," 1.

ideology, with a goal of democratic elections within a year. Although it took almost two years for elections to be held, by many accounts the military-backed coup helped to curtail growing corruption and the rising tide of extremism, something the government had been ineffective in combating.

Today, Bangladesh has returned to functioning as a legitimate democratic government that again is on a path towards greater stability, but it must continue to define its role in the globalized world by addressing severe economic and systemic infrastructure concerns. By most accounts, the elections in 2007 were found to be legitimate and with minimal corruption. The election ultimately favored the Awami League, which has been in power since then. Elections are due to be held in 2012, and yet again Bangladesh experienced a potential return to military rule as mid-level Bangladesh army officers attempted to stage a coup in January 2012.<sup>26</sup> The Bangladesh military announced on January 19, 2012 that it had foiled a coup plot to unseat the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League. Brigadier General Muhammad Masud Razzaq, a Bangladesh army spokesman, cited officers with “extreme religious views” as the culprits in addition to a network of shadowy interests

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<sup>26</sup> Ishaan Tharoor, “Behind Bangladesh’s Failed Coup Plot,” Global Spin Magazine for Time Magazine at <http://globalspin.blogs.time.com/2012/01/19/behind-bangladeshs-failed-coup-plot-a-history-of-violence/>.

overseas.<sup>27</sup> These officers were, however, in the minority and were quickly identified and punished through the Bangladesh military judicial system. According to one Bangladeshi Army officer, this latest coup attempt in 2012 is not indicative of a rise in militant extremism within the Bangladesh Army or military.<sup>28</sup>

## **BANGLADESHI CULTURE**

### ***The National Anthem of Bangladesh***

*My Bengal of gold, I love you*

*Forever your skies, your air set my heart in tune as if it were a flute*

*In Spring, Oh mother mine, the fragrance from your mango-groves*

*makes me wild with joy – Ah what a thrill!*

*In Autumn, Oh mother of mine, in the full-blossomed paddy fields,*

*I have seen spread all over, sweet smiles!*

*Ah, what a beauty, what shades, what affection, what tenderness!*

*What a quilt you have spread at the feet of banyan trees*

*and along the banks of rivers!*

*Oh mother of mine, words from your lips are like nectar in my ears!*

*Ah, what a thrill!*

*If sadness, Oh mother of mine, casts a gloom on your face,*

*my eyes are filled with tears!*

Source: Rabindranath Tagore's original score in Bangla, translation by Professor Syed Ali Ahsan from This is Bangladesh (Dhaka, Ministry of Information).

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<sup>27</sup> Tharoor, "Behind Bangladesh's Failed Coup Plot."

<sup>28</sup> Interview by the author of a Bangladeshi Army Major in the infantry who was knowledgeable of the coup attempt and the efforts of his superiors to quell any militant extremism within the branch of the Bangladesh army. Interview conducted on 16 May 2012.



The process of identity formation is complex and tends to be unique for every group. Often, the concept of “culture” is prioritized over the concept of identity. Thus, identifiers of culture (language, ethnicity, religion, et. al.) are emphasized, absent the concept of identity.<sup>29</sup> This includes understanding how the social environment values, shapes, and interprets these identifiers so that they are integrated into a general narrative for social living. This social environment is an elastic entity that allows for a continuing inflow/outflow of values, while integrating and synthesizing information into a rationalized environment. While focusing on culture provides information, it is identity that provides context. Thus, identity provides more salient understanding about what cultural identifiers *mean* to the people.<sup>30</sup>

Bangladesh, with a population of 162,221,000, represents the third largest Muslim majority country after Indonesia and Pakistan, and has the unique distinction of holding the second largest annual Muslim pilgrimage after the Hajj: the Tabliqi Ijtema, which attracts approximately two million attendees each year.<sup>31</sup> These factors, coupled with political instability, rampant corruption, a 36.3% poverty rate, a 52% illiteracy rate, and almost 6% unemployment, seemingly make Bangladesh an

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<sup>29</sup> Marie Price and Martin Lewis, “The Reinvention of Cultural Geography,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 83, no. 1 (1993) pgs 1-17.

<sup>30</sup> Price and Lewis, “The Reinvention of Cultural Geography,” pgs 1-17.

<sup>31</sup> CIA World Factbook at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bg.html> (last accessed on 20 October 2011).

attractive recruiting target for al-Qaeda or other extremist groups who would welcome “failed state” status.<sup>32</sup> However, by most accounts, Bangladesh has not fallen prey to radical elements, even in a post-9/11 environment. Extremist groups, although they exist, have not managed to marginalize governance and gain a strong support base in Bangladesh. This is a testament to the democratic principles of a robust civil society, a vibrant community of nongovernmental organizations, an independent judiciary, and active participation of women in social and economic sectors.<sup>33</sup>

The most notable historical influence on the formation of the Bangladeshi mindset was that of the Pala Dynasty which ruled Bengal for approximately four hundred years from the mid eighth century. This century, often referred to the ‘golden chapter’ of Bengali history, left the blessings of humanism, stable governments, peace, and stability.<sup>34</sup> The Pala rulers were Buddhists while the common people were largely Hindu. The rulers adopted secularism in state policies and practiced religious toleration towards other faiths. This period was marked by enlightenment on one hand and an environment of religious toleration on

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<sup>32</sup> CIA World Factbook at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bg.html> (last accessed on 20 October 2011).

<sup>33</sup> Maneeza Hossain and Lisa Curtis, “Bangladesh: Checking Islamist Extremism in a Pivotal Democracy,” *Backgrounders, Published by the Heritage Foundation*, N. 2383, (22 March 2012), 2.

<sup>34</sup> Moinul Khan, “Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: Why it Failed to Take Root,” *Journal of Policing, Intelligence, and Counter Terrorism*, 6:1, 53.

the other as a result of the liberal policies and practices of the Buddhist rulers.<sup>35</sup>

Bangladeshi identity is an amalgamation of various influences, from religion, language, ethnicity, and the ecology of a river delta peoples. The story of Bangladesh is set against the backdrop of alluvial plains at the delta of the Ganges and Brahmaputra (locally known as “Jamuna”) rivers.<sup>36</sup> As such, the existence of Bangladeshi culture is affected by, and dependent on, the tides and flow of the Ganges and Brahmaputra. The numerous rivers and tributaries that connect to these main arteries mark both the physiography of the nation and the life of its people. They provide rich and fertile soil and a source of irrigation for the principle crops grown: rice and jute. They also provide an abundance of fish and seafood, making rice and fish staples in Bangladeshi diet. These rivers also set the conditions for much of Bangladesh’s misery: annual flooding that decimate crops and carry waterborne disease. These river systems are at the same time the country’s greatest resource and greatest hazard.<sup>37</sup>

Bangladesh is also noted for its remarkable ethnic and cultural homogeneity. 98% of its populace is Bengali, with the remainder Beharis or, non-Bengali, Muslims.<sup>38</sup> Linguistic history is equally homogeneous,

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<sup>35</sup> Khan, “Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: Why it Failed to Take Root,” 53.

<sup>36</sup> Craig Baxter, *Bangladesh, A New Nation in and old Setting*, (Boulder, Westview Press, 1984) 3.

<sup>37</sup> James Heitzman and Robert Worden, *Bangladesh, A Country Study*, (Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989) 49.

<sup>38</sup> Heitzman, Worden, *Bangladesh, A Country Study*, 25.

with Bangladesh being the only country in South Asia that is predominantly unilingual, as Bangla serves as the official mother tongue. The failure of Pakistanis to give Bangla coequal status with Urdu as a national language of Pakistan was one of the key grievances leading to civil war in 1971.<sup>39</sup> Post-independence linguistic nationalism ran high, but has tempered off recently as the realization that English, as an international language, is key to Bangladesh's future development. Still, the Bangladeshi identity is closely linked to pride in Bangla as a national language. As eighth in world languages in terms of number of speakers, Bangladeshis are proud of the rich and substantial Bangla literature, especially its poetry.<sup>40</sup>

Bangladeshi identity is also defined by Islam. Nearly 90% of the population is Muslim, with the remaining 10% comprised of mostly Hindus and some Christians.<sup>41</sup> From the very birth of Bangladesh, this identity has, while not being at odds with its cultural identity, been a source of uncertainty for the citizenry. Loyalty to Islam is deeply rooted, but local customs and observances at times run contrary to orthodox Islamic teachings. However, by most accounts, the country has always been remarkably free of sectarian conflict and its consequent violence due to the common thread of Bangla as the language of the Muslim

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<sup>39</sup> Baxter, *Bangladesh, A New Nation in and old Setting*, 19.

<sup>40</sup> Charles O'Donnell, *Bangladesh, Biography of a Muslim Nation*, (Boulder, Westview Press, 1984) 26.

<sup>41</sup> CIA World Factbook at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bg.html> (last accessed on 20 October 2011).

majority and Hindu minority.<sup>42</sup> Islam might have entered through the country's Chittagong port on the Bay of Bengal, a port used by Arab merchants who were trading with China and other Kingdoms of Southeast Asia. Islam's popularity in India and Bangladesh increased with its message of equality among people in an age when Hindus in a caste-ridden society suffered inequality and a lack of social mobility. The message of Islam appealed with its absolute unity of God and its egalitarian approach to human and social organizations. However, conversions to Islam came with the attached cultural mores of Hindu tradition practiced for centuries.<sup>43</sup>

But the question, then and now, remains: Are Bangladeshis Bengalis first? Do they look to their unifying cultural and linguistic past? Or are they Muslims first?<sup>44</sup> For most believers Islam was largely a matter of customs and mores which did not encumber their identity as Bengalis. This identity crisis of being a Muslim first or a Bengali first is a critical one for the state to understand as it dictates loyalties. In many Western nations, for example, the primary loyalty of the population is to the state.<sup>45</sup> In the Islamic world, however, loyalty to a nation-state is

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<sup>42</sup> Heitzman, Worden, Bangladesh, *A Country Study*, 46.

<sup>43</sup> Khan, "Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: Why it Failed to Take Root," 54.

<sup>44</sup> Baxter, *Bangladesh, A New Nation in and old Setting*, 1.

<sup>45</sup> Department of Geography, Penn State University, at <https://www.e-education.psu.edu/geog880/node/259> (accessed 19 June 2011).

trumped by loyalty and dedication to one's religion, and as an extension of religion, one's family, tribe, and culture.<sup>46</sup>

Bengali politics sought to differentiate the identities of being a Bengali with that of being a Muslim by generally favoring secular prose in rule of law, the constitution, and most governing documents. However, given the deep-rooted nature of Islam as an integral part of Bengali culture and history, even secularist ideologues such as Mujibur Rahman sought to accommodate it in governance.<sup>47</sup> The complex nature of this cultural identity crisis, between being a Bengali and being a Muslim, is one that is easily exploited by militant extremists in an effort to divide Bangladesh civil society. Extremist ideology seeks to create a dichotomy between the fictionalized monolithic Islam and a local culture redefined and rebranded as "too Hindu." Experts agree that this is an artificial rift that is cunningly designed as an expression of power rather than as a reflection of genuine native conflict.<sup>48</sup>

## **GEOGRAPHY OF BANGLADESH**

Tucked away in almost a hidden corner of the South Asian subcontinent, Bangladesh's topography is defined by two distinct features: broad deltaic plains subject to frequent flooding and smaller,

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<sup>46</sup> Department of Geography, Penn State University, at <https://www.e-education.psu.edu/geog880/node/259> (accessed 19 June 2011).

<sup>47</sup> Maneeza Hossain, "The Road to a Sharia State? Cultural Radicalization in Bangladesh." *Hudson Institute White Paper*, November 2006, 8.

<sup>48</sup> Hossain, "The Road to a Sharia State? Cultural Radicalization in Bangladesh."

hilly regions crisscrossed by swiftly flowing waters.<sup>49</sup> In an area of 144,000 square kilometers (55,598 square miles), Bangladesh is bordered to the West, North, and East by a 2,400-kilometer land frontier border with India and in the southeast, a shorter, land/water frontier border with Myanmar. The southern border is comprised of a highly irregular deltaic coastline of approximately 600 kilometers that feeds into the Bay of Bengal.<sup>50</sup> Approximately 80% of Bangladesh's landmass is arable land made up of fertile alluvial lowlands called the Bangladesh Plain. This plain is part of the greater Plain of Bengal, which is itself part of the Lower Gangetic plain of South Asia.<sup>51</sup>

Bangladesh's limited resources, limited useable land, and location on the subcontinent have greatly influenced the mobility of its people, their social and economic pursuits, and their political actions. History attests that the size of a nation is neither a measure of its problems nor its ability to cope with them. Bangladesh's modest size does not make its problems more manageable. Indeed, problems are sometimes more concentrated and more visible.<sup>52</sup> This is especially true for violent extremism that has the ability to terrorize the small nation with focused effort.

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<sup>49</sup> Heitzman, Worden, Bangladesh, *A Country Study*, 46.

<sup>50</sup> Heitzman, Worden, Bangladesh, *A Country Study*, 47.

<sup>51</sup> Heitzman, Worden, Bangladesh, *A Country Study*, 47.

<sup>52</sup> Charles O'Donnell, *Bangladesh, Biography of a Muslim Nation*, (Boulder, Westview Press, 1984) 26.

Conversely, Bangladesh's topography as a plains area may be one of its best assets in the fight against extremism as cultural geographers note that a region's landscape has a role in modeling social relations and culture.<sup>53</sup> Given the ethnographical heritage as a plains people, Bangladeshis have been exposed to diverse cultures and societies through trade, migration, and other travel (indeed, it was conducive to the way Islam itself spread in the region). In sharp contrast, Afghanistan and Pakistan's mountainous regions, as viewed through a cultural geographer's lens, dictate a culture that is less welcoming of outside influence and exposure and more entrenched in its own indigenous culture.<sup>54</sup> Thus, each region's cultural landscape was shaped by the natural landscape and ethnography of the area. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, and the cultural landscape is the result.<sup>55</sup> Thus, Bangladesh seemingly has a geographic bias against militant extremism.

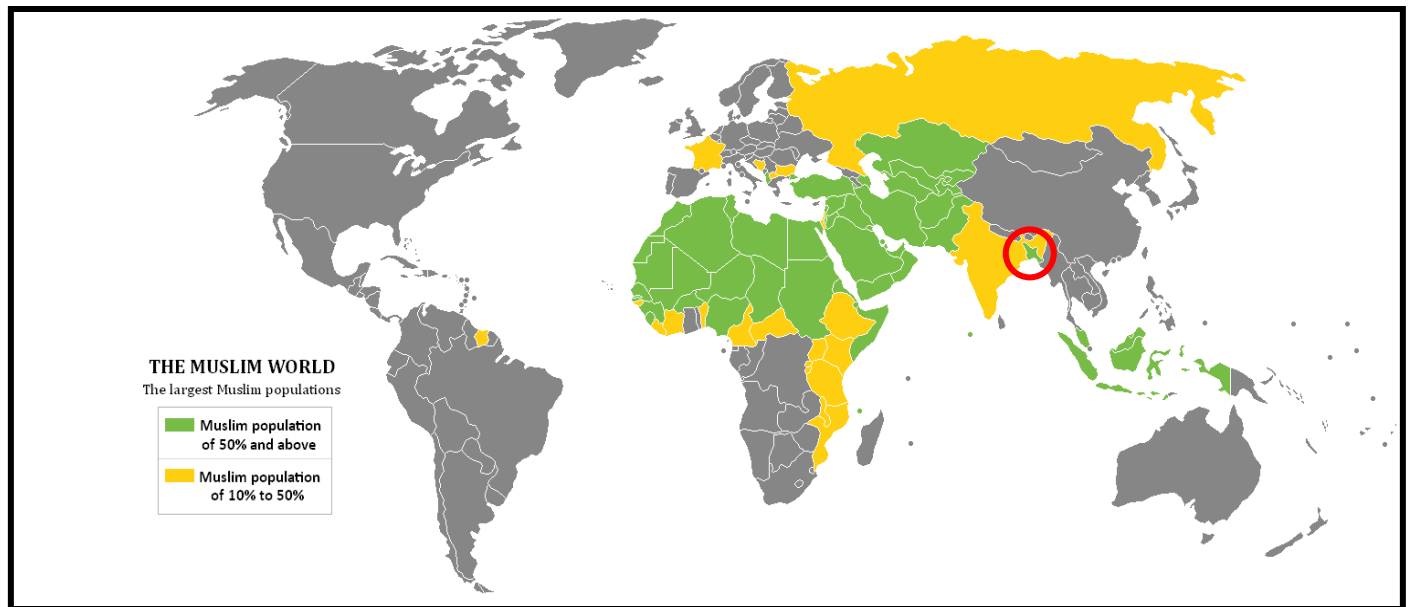
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<sup>53</sup> Marie Price and Martin Lewis, "The Reinvention of Cultural Geography," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 83, no. 1 (1993) pgs 1-17.

<sup>54</sup> Price and Lewis, "The Reinvention of Cultural Geography."

<sup>55</sup> Carl Sauer, "The Morphology of Landscape," *University of California Publications in Geography*, 2, no.2, 19-53.





**Figure 2: The Muslim World (Source: Google images, The Muslim World, [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/archive/2/2e/20081002185502!Muslim\\_world\\_map.png](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/archive/2/2e/20081002185502!Muslim_world_map.png).)**

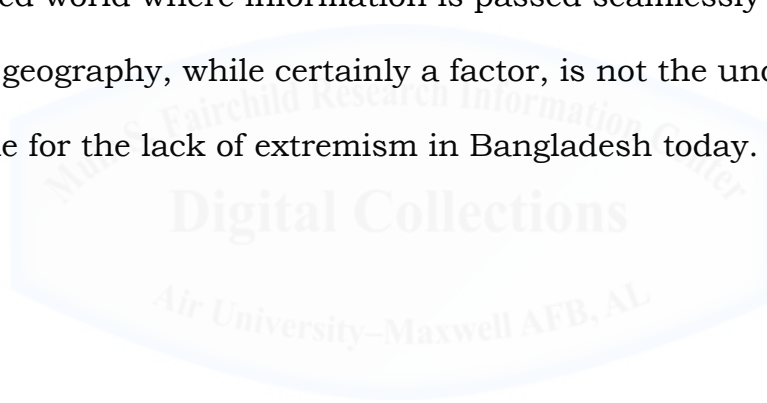
As seen in Figure 1-1, "The Muslim World," the very nature of Bangladesh's geography dictated both the way Islam came to the region, as well as implications for its present-day lack of extremism. Due to its isolated nature, Islam spread to the region through predominantly peaceful means (as opposed to conquest), and it is relatively isolated from much of the current extremist movements found in the Middle East and Afghanistan.<sup>56</sup> This does not mean, however, that Bangladesh is completely immune to such ideology. Bangladesh's main export is human capital in the form of young male migrant workers to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and other Middle Eastern countries.

<sup>56</sup> Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204 – 1760*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993) 26.

It is there that, while working for months or years away from family and friends, would-be Islamists have a captive audience to indoctrinate fundamentalist ideology and Islamist theories.

These workers eventually return to Bangladesh and may espouse what they have learned to an Islamically illiterate populace.

Unfortunately, these concepts and ideas that come from the “land of the Prophet” in the Middle East ostensibly have more weight and have taken hold as scholarly doctrine. Based on this, and the added weight of a globalized world where information is passed seamlessly to those that seek it, geography, while certainly a factor, is not the underlying rationale for the lack of extremism in Bangladesh today.



## CHAPTER 2

### THE RISE OF MILITANCY

It is important to note that Bangladesh suffers from two distinct forms of militancy and extremist violence, one left-wing and one right-wing. Bangladesh has been subject to the perils of political-based left-wing extremism even before inception, while the manifestation of right-wing extremism is a more recent phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> Borne from anti-colonial rhetoric, ultra-leftist organizations have sought to marginalize political debate and civil advancement, favoring communist rule over democracy, or even an independent Bangladesh.<sup>2</sup> Since independence in 1971, left-wing extremists have been a source of insecurity for Bangladeshi civil society through sporadic acts of violence, robbery, murder, extortion, kidnapping-for-ransom, and other illegal activities. As Bangladesh established itself as a burgeoning democracy, these leftist groups transformed their agenda to political ideology, fueled by a corrupt political landscape and the zero-sum nature of Bangladeshi politics.<sup>3</sup>

The history of radical left-wing politics traces its roots back to the Communist Party of India under the British Raj, and later the

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<sup>1</sup> Zohra Akhtar, "Trends in Militancy in Bangladesh," in *Trends in Militancy in Bangladesh, Possible Responses*, edited by Farooq Sobhan, (Dhaka, University Press Ltd, 2010), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Akhtar, "Trends in Militancy in Bangladesh," in *Trends in Militancy in Bangladesh, Possible Responses*, 15.

<sup>3</sup> Akhtar, "Trends in Militancy in Bangladesh," in *Trends in Militancy in Bangladesh, Possible Responses*, 18.

Communist Party of Pakistan with two factions, the “Soviet line” and “Beijing line” which favored the War of Liberation of Bangladesh.<sup>4</sup> Fashioning themselves under Maoist doctrine, the Beijing line, which supported an independent Bangladesh, would later come under attack from the first government under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Crippled under the secularist agenda, they would survive by relying on splinter rural factional politics that led to extortion, toll collection, and thuggery.<sup>5</sup> Armed with new targets, these organizations recruited new, opportunistic militants to carry out terrorist activities predominantly in the southwestern regions of Bangladesh throughout the 1970s, ‘80s and early ‘90s. Their targets, being mainly internal to Bangladesh, went largely unnoticed by the international community because that violence was ascribed as merely criminal activity to be tackled and dealt with by the Bangladeshi government.<sup>6</sup>

Modern day left-wing extremism is linked with a few organizations, namely the Gono Mukti Fouz (GMF), Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP), and the New Biplobi Communist Party (NBCP).<sup>7</sup> These organizations are at the forefront of factions loyal to establishing communist rule in Bangladesh. Conversely, right-wing militant

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<sup>4</sup> Akhtar, “Trends in Militancy in Bangladesh,” in *Trends in Militancy in Bangladesh, Possible Responses*, 25.

<sup>5</sup> Akhtar, “Trends in Militancy in Bangladesh,” in *Trends in Militancy in Bangladesh, Possible Responses*, 18.

<sup>6</sup> Akhtar, “Trends in Militancy in Bangladesh,” in *Trends in Militancy in Bangladesh, Possible Responses*, 16.

<sup>7</sup> Ashok Kapur, Charles Kennedy, Mahendra Lawoti, Yogendra Malik, Richard Oberst, Syedur Rahman, *Government and Politics in South Asia*, (Philadelphia, Westview Press, 2009) 292.

extremism, borne out of a global, religious-based, Islamist vision for Bangladesh, has far reaching implications in a post-9/11 global community and, in particular, for US national security interests in the region. Therefore, this study focuses on right-wing militant extremism as a function of governance, culture, or geography.

## **ANTECEDENTS TO VIOLENCE**

Right-wing extremist ideology in Bangladesh is based on the politicization of Islam, directly or indirectly, for political gain. Thus, the phenomenology of the so-called Islamist movement in Bangladesh is more a function of political expediency in an already chaotic, fledgling democracy characterized by mis-governance, nepotism, and corruption. Bangladesh's nascent and ill-functioning government faced the conditions for right-wing militant extremism based on two global developments: the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, and the conclusion of the Afghan-Soviet war and subsequent return of Bangladeshi Mujahidin with their newfound political ideology. These two events were both transformations in the character and place of Islam in modern Muslim society.<sup>8</sup> They effectively enabled the incremental dominance of Islamist discourse in Arab and other Muslim political cultures.

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<sup>8</sup> Hassan Mneimneh, "Islamism," American Enterprise Institute Critical Threats Brief at <http://www.criticalthreats.org/islamism> (accessed 10 May 2011).

The war in Afghanistan held particular importance in Bangladesh because it attracted a number of Bangladeshi recruits who travelled to the region to join in jihad. A confluence of factors led Islamist movements throughout the world to embrace the resistance to Soviet occupation in 1980, the aftermath of which would prove to have major consequences in the international arena.<sup>9</sup> What Afghanistan provided was twofold: a) a declaration of military victory over a non-Muslim power, and b) the locus for the fusion of disparate Islamic doctrines, strategies, and ideologies that previously had acted alone without much merit or success.<sup>10</sup> Emboldened by these two factors, a new form of militant extremism was born. Specifically, for Bangladesh, this meant the graduation of Afghan-style jihad into a global endeavor, with its sights set locally on an “overly-secular” Bangladeshi civil society. Thus, the returnees believed that the ideology they witnessed and imbibed in Afghanistan could be transplanted with ease to the Muslim population in Bangladesh.

Further exacerbating the rise in right-wing militancy was the government’s lack of capacity, resources, or programs, to reintegrate these battle-hardened soldiers back into civil society, or even to provide the most basic avenues for gainful employment. This aspect of phenomenology gave potency to the militant voice and effectively exposed

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<sup>9</sup>Maneeza Hossain, “Broken Pendulum, Bangladesh’s Swing to Radicalism,” Hudson Institute Inc, 2007, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Maneeza Hossain, “Broken Pendulum, Bangladesh’s Swing to Radicalism,” Hudson Institute Inc, 2007, 8.

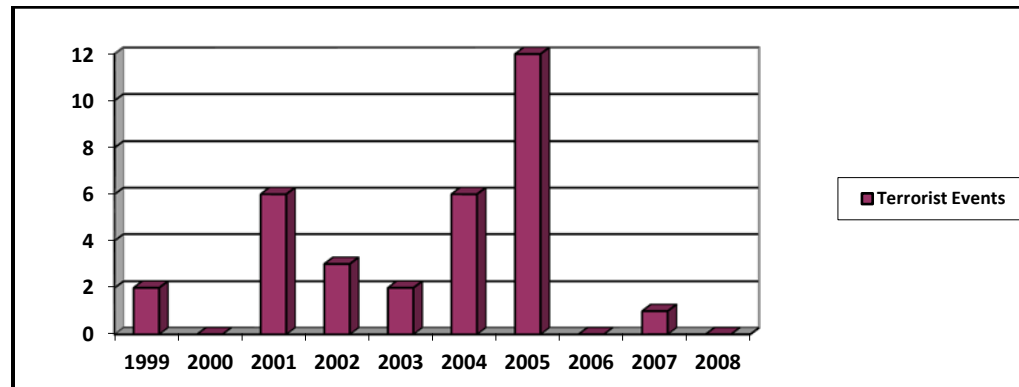
Bangladesh's deep political divisions to their advantage. Though relatively few in number, these returning Mujahidin had significant roles in radicalizing small, isolated segments of Bangladeshi society. They effectively created three of the most militant extremist groups Bangladesh had seen in its short existence as a sovereign nation state: Jamaatul Mujahidin Bangladesh (JMB), Harkatul Jihad Al-Islam (HuJI-BD), and the Jagrata Muslim Janata (JMJB).<sup>11</sup> Since the 1990s, these right-wing extremist groups, as well as splinter groups and other extremists, have been undermining governance by attempting to supplant modern intellectuals that had a firmly secular vision for Bangladesh within their own Islamist ideology. The distinction must be made, however, between the rise in Islamist activity and that of militant extremism.

While Islamist forces use religion mainly as a means to acquire political power, militant extremists use violence as phenomenology under the guise of Islamism to objectify "Islam" as a utopian ideal. Political power is not necessarily their aim. Instead, Islamic law and practice is the objective for their violence. Part of that phenomenology for Bangladesh resides in its status as a majority Muslim society on the "periphery" of Islamic civilization: Islamist ideology that may have some authority in the Near Eastern tradition of Islam presents a more

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<sup>11</sup> Khan, "Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: Why it Failed to Take Root," 53.

problematic interpretation as it travels into multi-ethnic regions that retained elements of local customs and beliefs.



**Figure 3: Terrorist Incidents by Militant Extremists in Bangladesh (Source: Created by the author data gathered from *Trends in Militancy in Bangladesh, Possible Responses*, edited by Farooq Sobhan, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, 2010.**

Despite the resilience of Bangladeshi civil society, militant extremist activity increased in the latter half of the 1990s and in the first decade of the new millennium. This increase in activism, however, marked the assertion of political-economic interests rather than an attempt to attain religious objectives. Militant extremists draw on Islamic referents – terms, symbols, and events taken from Islamic tradition – in order to articulate a distinct political agenda.<sup>12</sup> To them, Islam is more a political blueprint than a faith, and Islamic discourse is,

<sup>12</sup> Ali Riaz, *God Willing, The Politics of Islamism in Bangladesh*, (Oxford, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2004) 14. As quoted from Richard Hrair Dekmajian, “The Anatomy of Islamic Revivalism: Legitimacy, Crisis, Ethnic Conflict and the Search for Islamic Alternatives,” *Middle East Journal*, 34 no.1 (Winter 1980): 1-12.



to a large extent, political discourse in religious garb.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the extremists use a form of instrumentalization of Islam in their quest for legitimacy as well as imagining a future, the foundations of which rest on reappropriated and reinvented concepts borrowed from the Islamic tradition.<sup>14</sup>

This reasoning is the basis for the counterargument that Bangladesh's functioning democracy does not have a significant bearing on the lack of violent extremism. In fact, some contend that Bangladesh is witnessing a surge in violent extremism from Islamist groups, such as the recognized and legitimate political organization *Jamaate Islami*. As a legitimate political party, *Jamaate Islami* undermines the argument that a robust democracy quells extremism. The emergence of this particular brand of militancy is based in the concept of *dawa*, which, narrowly defined, means missionary activity aimed at exhorting Muslims to adhere better to the precepts of their religion. But Islam makes no distinction between Islam as a religion and Islam as a state. Thus, *Dawa* is used in

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<sup>13</sup> Ali Riaz, *God Willing, The Politics of Islamism in Bangladesh*, (Oxford, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2004) 14. As quoted from Richard Hrair Dekmajian, "The Anatomy of Islamic Revivalism: Legitimacy, Crisis, Ethnic Conflict and the Search for Islamic Alternatives," *Middle East Journal*, 34 no.1 (Winter 1980): 1-12.

<sup>14</sup> Ali Riaz, *God Willing, The Politics of Islamism in Bangladesh*, (Oxford, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2004) 14. As quoted from "Islamic Revival in the Middle East and North Africa," *Current History* (April 1980), 169-74.

Islamist political activity, mainly, the *Jamaate Islami* party, with plausible deniability as to its religious connotation.<sup>15</sup>

Islam as a religion encompasses a variety of perspectives and is generally more focused on orthopraxis, “right action,” rather than orthodoxy, “right teaching,” or the accomplishing of a modern goal, such as an “Islamic state.”<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, that distinction is lost on militant extremists who would not differentiate Islam the religion from political action. For Bangladesh, this political action and extremist ideology was set forth by targeting, attacking, or otherwise marginalizing six aspects of Bangladeshi culture:

1) Hindu traditions: The notion that Bangladeshi culture has been too heavily influenced by Hindu traditions. This further marginalizes actual Hindus in Bangladesh, who are therefore at risk of being persecuted further in an Islamist state.

2) Christian targets: “Christian” is used as a euphemism for “Western,” as it pertains to use of English in schools, or democratic institutions.

3) “Heretics:” These are Muslims who choose a path different than the monolithic faith promoted by Islamists.

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<sup>15</sup> Maneeza Hossain, “Broken Pendulum, Bangladesh’s Swing to Radicalism,” Hudson Institute Inc, 2007, 28.

<sup>16</sup> Discussions with Mr. Iqbal Akhtar, Ph.D candidate in theology, University of Edinburgh, as to the distinctions between Islamist and those who use Islamist ideology to further their militant extremism. Discussions held on various dates, but this information was specifically discussed on 20 April 2012.

4) “Minorities:” These are Hindus and other religious minorities (such as Ahmadiyyas) that would face further persecution

5) “Socially deviant:” In particular, this is used in reference to women and women activists. Traditional Bangladesh culture, historically, has not relegated women to the private realm. Instead, many businesses and political parties are run by women. Islamist movements in this area have been carefully orchestrated because the population is generally accepting of a more outward womanly role.

6) “Critical voices:” These are journalists and reporters that are critical of any Islamist movements.<sup>17</sup>

### **MILITANT EXTREMIST ACTIVITY**

Starting in 1999, Bangladesh witnessed an increase in militant extremist activity, reaching an apex in 2005, and then rapidly subsiding due to increased government awareness, legislation, intelligence, and mobilization of counterterrorism forces. The following Tables list major incidents of extremist violence as reported by Lt Gen M. Bammi in *India-Bangladesh Relations, The Way Ahead*.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Hossain, “Broken Pendulum, Bangladesh’s Swing to Radicalism,” Hudson Institute Inc, 2007, 22.

<sup>18</sup> Dr. Y.M. Bammi, *India Bangladesh Relations, The Way Ahead*, (New Delhi, Vij Books India Ltd, 2010) 227.

**TABLE 1 – Incidents during Awami League tenure, 1996 – 2001**

- March 6, 1999 – explosions during Udichi (a secular independent cultural organization) cultural events in Jessore district which killed 10 people and injured over 100.
- October 8, 1999 – Eight people killed and 30 others injured in a bomb blast at Ahmedia Masjid in Khulna. This was followed by another bomb blast at Alai Pak Darbar Sharif – a center for congregation of followers of Sufi Muslim holy men in Faridpur district, killing four people.
- January 20, 2001 – Seven people were killed in bomb blasts at the Communist Party Bangladesh rally in Paltan Maidan and the nearby Awami League offices on Bangabandhu Avenue, Dhaka.
- April 14, 2001 – The first day of the Bengali New Year, 10 people were killed and approximately 50 wounded in bomb explosions at a cultural function at Ramna Park in Dhaka.
- June 3, 2001 – 10 people killed and 30 injured in a bomb attack on a church in Baniarchang Gopalganj district.
- June 15, 2001 – Bomb attack on the Awami League office in Narayanganj district left 22 people dead and many more injured.
- September 23, 2001 – Eight people killed and over 100 injured in a bomb attack on an Awami League public meeting in Mollarhat, near the Bagerhat district.
- September 26, 2001 – Four people killed in a bomb blast near an Awami League rally in Sunamganj district.

(Source: Zohra Akhtar, "Trends in Militancy in Bangladesh," in Trends in Militancy in Bangladesh, Possible Responses, edited by Farooq Sobhan, (Dhaka, University Press Ltd, 2010).

**TABLE 2 – Incidents during the Bangladesh Nationalist Party’s tenure from 2001 – 2006**

- September 28, 2002 – More than 100 people were injured in a series of blasts at a movie theater and circus arena in Satkhira district.
- December 7, 2002 – Bomb blasts in four movie theaters in Mymensingh district killed 27 and injured more than 200.
- January 17, 2003 – Seven people killed and 20 others injured in a bomb blast at a cultural fair in Tangail district.
- January 15, 2004 – Bomb blast killed a journalist near the Khulna Press Club and wounded 4 others.
- May 21, 2004 – Three people killed and 70 injured in a powerful bomb blast at Hazrat Shahjajal Shrine in Sylhet district. The British High Commissioner in Bangladesh, Mr. Anwar Choudhury, was among those injured.
- August 21, 2004 – Grenade attacks on an Awami League rally in Dhaka left 22 people, including Senior Awami League leader, Mrs. Ivy Rahman, dead and over 100 injured. Awami League president Sheikh Hasina narrowly escaped the attack.
- January 27, 2005 – Grenade attack on an Awami League rally in Habibganj district left four people dead, including a senior Awami League leader and former Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria.
- August 17, 2005 – Over 450 bomb blasts in the span of 30 minutes in 63 of the existing 64 districts left 2 people dead and over 100 injured. This attack would be the defining moment for the GOB to admit that it did not have adequate legislation and control measures in place to combat extremist activity.

- November 14, 2005 – Bomb attacks on a city official’s vehicle in the southern district of Jhalakati left seven people dead including two judges of the district court.
- November 29, 2005 – The first-ever Bangladeshi suicide-bomber attack of a courthouse in the Gazipur district. The extremist killed himself along with seven others.
- November 29, 2005 – Identical suicide-bomber attack in the district court of the port city of Chittagong. This attack on a police transport unit left two dead, including one policeman, and injured 20 others.
- December 8, 2005 – A suicide bomber attacked an Udichi cultural event in Mymensingh district, killing eight people and wounding 50 others.<sup>19</sup>

(Source: Zohra Akhtar, “Trends in Militancy in Bangladesh,” in Trends in Militancy in Bangladesh, Possible Responses, edited by Farooq Sobhan, (Dhaka, University Press Ltd, 2010).

## **MILITANT ORGANIZATIONS**

The emergence of militant organizations in Bangladesh was amplified with the 1989 of the Mujahidin from Afghanistan, which can claim direct credit for the establishment of JMB, HuJI-B, and JMJB. While accurate figures do not exist for the numbers of actual Mujahidin that went to fight in Afghanistan, it is estimated that approximately 3000-4000 Bangladeshis were recruited for the cause.<sup>20</sup> Although the war was mainly a proxy confrontation between two superpowers, it

<sup>19</sup> Dr. Y.M. Bammi, *India Bangladesh Relations, The Way Ahead*, (New Delhi, Vij Books India Ltd, 2010) 227.

<sup>20</sup> Khan, “Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: Why it Failed to Take Root,” 58.

legitimized the concept of Jihad by religious zealots who became indoctrinated with radical ideology and also received military training. These Afghan veterans, on returning home to Bangladesh after the war ended, sought to implement their interpretation of Islam and believed they would receive a favorable response. And so the initial organizations were created to provide a structured outlet with which to convey their message.

These organizations contributed to an already established cadre of left-wing extremist groups, some of whom reinvented themselves to take up more right-wing, transnational-based issues such as terrorism and terrorist financing operations. Again, the period from 1999 to 2005 saw the greatest mobilization of militant organizations when, in 2005, a total of 33 militant extremist groups were identified by the Awami League as hostile to Bangladeshi polity and culture.<sup>21</sup> Since 2005, however, with the increased emphasis on identifying, capturing, and suppressing militant organizations, the caretaker government, and subsequently the Awami League government, sharpened the focus to approximately 14 or 15 groups. Furthermore, they have continued the bans put in place by

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<sup>21</sup> Sreeradha Datta, "Islamic Militancy in Bangladesh: The Threat from Within," *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 30, no.1, April 2007 which cites an Awami League publication: "Growing Fanaticism and Extremism in Bangladesh: Shades of the Taliban" at <http://www.albd.org/aldoc/growing/growing.fanaticism.pdf> (June 2005).

the previous ruling BNP government of JMB, HuJIB, Hizb-ut Touhid, and Ulama Anjuman Al Bainat.<sup>22</sup>

Many of these groups operate periodically under different names or reinvent themselves when faced with political and law enforcement pressure. But they all have been identified as being committed to bringing about an Islamist-styled revolution in Bangladesh. That their names and ideologies are enveloped in religious-based beliefs and dogma is no accident. From simply catering to their core audience in a Muslim-majority nation, to attempts at ingratiating themselves as part of a larger, global initiative and thereby attributing legitimacy to their cause, these organizations share fundamental commonalities as religio-political factions. Bangladesh initially did not correlate the agenda and intentions of these organizations and global terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda.<sup>23</sup> The parochial goals of the Bangladesh militants to remake Bangladesh in their own image was not necessarily a commitment to a world-wide Jihad effort.

The phenomenology of these groups is unique to Bangladesh, although they would certainly claim linkages with international organizations for legitimacy. Specifically, these groups do not challenge Bangladesh as a nation-state, but rather wish to impose sharia-based

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<sup>22</sup> Datta, "Islamic Militancy in Bangladesh: The Threat from Within"

<sup>23</sup> Khan, "Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: Why it Failed to Take Root," 53.



laws within the construct of Bangladeshi governance and society.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, the growing market economy in Bangladesh seems to have their approval, and none espouses autocratic rule, or any semblance of monarchy, as found in other Islamic nation-states. Nevertheless, the emergence and staying power of militant extremist organizations in Bangladesh over the last decade is a worrisome trend.

The following list of known active organizations is a cause for concern and bears closer scrutiny by the Bangladesh government for their established use of violence against Bangladeshi citizens and interests.<sup>25</sup> This list does not include political parties and groups, such as *Jamaat-e-Islami* or the Islamic Democratic Party as they have made inroads toward legitimacy by alliances with either the Awami League or the BNP.

- Ahle Hadith Andolan – Bangladesh (Ahab)
- Al Haramain (banned in 2004), linked with al-Qaeda
- Allahr Dal
- Harkatul Jihad-e-Islami Bangladesh (HuJIB)\*
- Hizb-ut Tahrir
- Hizb-ut Touhid\*
- Islami Samaj
- Jagrata Muslim Janta Bangladesh (JMJB)
- Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB)\*
- Jamaat Qurania Arabia
- Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO)
- Shahadate Al Hikma Party Bangladesh

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<sup>24</sup> Riaz, *God Willing, The Politics of Islamism in Bangladesh*, 15.

<sup>25</sup> Bammi, *India Bangladesh Relations, The Way Ahead*, 233.

- Tamira Ar – Din BD (Hizb e Abu Omar)
  - Touhid Trust
  - Ulama Anjuman Al Bainat\*
- \*Banned by BNP in 2005

In addition to these active and recognized organizations, Bangladesh has also grappled with foreign extremist elements from its border regions with Myanmar. According to a 2007 Congressional Research Service Report for Congress titled “Islamist Extremism in Bangladesh,” there is concern that Bangladesh might serve as a base for support to various militant groups such as al-Qaeda, especially within the displaced Rohingyas ethnic group located in the Southeast quadrant of the country.<sup>26</sup> According to the report, Indian intelligence officials allege that HuJIB members are training Muslim Rohingyas in refugee camps along the border in an effort to provide recruits for Al-Qaeda’s causes in Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Chechnya. The Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) represents over 120,000 Rohingyas living in Bangladesh with ties to al-Qaeda and other extremist groups.<sup>27</sup>

The plight of the Rohingyas as a refugee group dates back to between the 9th and 15th centuries when Muslim traders in former Burma settled in the region and introduced Islam to a predominantly Buddhist region.<sup>28</sup> The Burmese area of Arakan was separated from the

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<sup>26</sup> Bruce Vaughn, “Islamist Extremism in Bangladesh,” CRS Report for Congress, January 31, 2007, 5.

<sup>27</sup> Vaughn, “Islamist Extremism in Bangladesh,” 6.

<sup>28</sup> Bertil Lintner, “Bangladesh Extremist Islamist Consolidation,” *Faultlines*, vol 14, July 2003, 3.

rest of Burma by a densely forested mountain range which made it possible for the Arakanese to remain largely isolated from the rest of Burma and maintain their independence until the late 18th century. The Muslim offspring of the Arab and Persian traders and the local Arakanese eventually became to be known as the Rohingyas. Today, the Rohingya share a common Bangla dialect with Bangladeshis from the Chittagong area, infused with words borrowed from Persian, Urdu, and Arakanese.<sup>29</sup>

There is no evidence of friction between the new Muslim Rohingyas and the existing Buddhist neighbors until the 16th century. Indeed, earlier Arakanese kings, though Buddhist, used Muslim titles in addition to their Arakanese names and issued medallions bearing the Muslim Kalima, or confession of faith stating a belief in one God.<sup>30</sup> Persian was the official court language until the Burmese invasion in 1784. With British rule in the late 1800s, the Arakan region was used for agriculture and British rulers transported Muslim subjects from East Bengal to help with the seasonal harvest. These workers over time transformed the heavy Persian influence with more Sufi traditions, and began to settle in the area over multiple generations. At the same time, Buddhist

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<sup>29</sup> Lintner, "Bangladesh Extremist Islamist Consolidation," 8.

<sup>30</sup> Lintner, "Bangladesh Extremist Islamist Consolidation," 4.

Arakanese migrated to East Bengal and settled along the coast between Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar.<sup>31</sup>

The presence of a Muslim minority in the Arakan region of Burma became an issue after Burma's independence in 1948. The Buddhist and Muslim communities had become divided in World War Two because the Buddhist rallied behind the Japanese while the Muslims remained loyal to the British.<sup>32</sup> After the war and Burmese independence, these Muslims feared reprisal for their support of the British and rose up in arms demanding their own independent state of Arakan. The Burmese army was able to quell the rebellion with relative ease and slowly expelled the Rohingyas into East Bengal, now Bangladesh, into refugee camps along the border region. By 1978, the Rohingya population exceeded half a million refugees living in Bangladesh. Bangladesh, without the capacity to provide basic humanitarian assistance to these new refugees allowed Saudi Arabian charities to set up Madrassas and medical facilities for the refugees. Slowly, the Rohingyas set up a political organization, the Rohingya Patriotic Front (RPF) with the stated goal of exerting influence for their cause in the Bangladeshi government.<sup>33</sup>

In the early 1980s, more radical elements of the Rohingyas broke away from the RPF and created the RSO to provide a more militant front

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<sup>31</sup> Lintner, "Bangladesh Extremist Islamist Consolidation," 4.

<sup>32</sup> Lintner, "Bangladesh Extremist Islamist Consolidation," 6.

<sup>33</sup> Lintner, "Bangladesh Extremist Islamist Consolidation," 9.

for their cause. With its more rigid understanding and practice of Islam, the RSO slowly gained support from like-minded international organizations in the Muslim world and began offering recruits for various causes.<sup>34</sup> Specifically, many of the madrassas were transformed into training camps designed to provide able soldiers for these causes. The expansion of RSO in the late 1980s and early 1990s prompted the Burmese government to launch a massive counter offensive to secure the border area. In December 1991, Burmese soldiers crossed into Bangladesh and attacked a Bangladeshi military outpost.

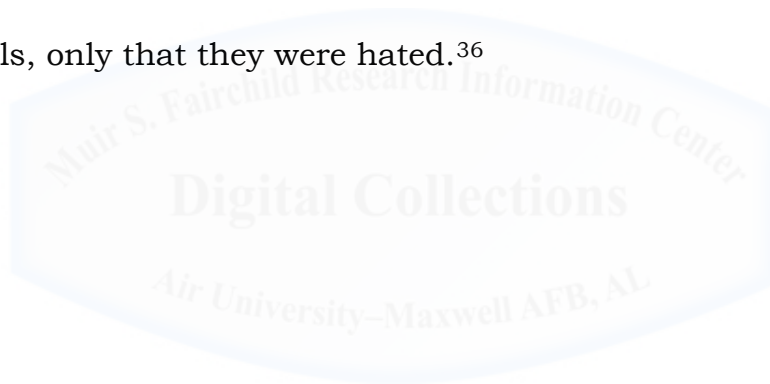
This incident developed into a major crisis in Bangladesh-Burma relations and by April 1992 more than 250,000 additional Rohingya civilians had been forced out of Arakan and into neighboring Bangladesh. With the help of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Burma eventually took back most of the refugees, leaving approximately 50,000 supervised refugees in UNHCR-run camps. But it is estimated that an additional 100,000 plus Rohingyas continue to live in Bangladesh without the supervision of the UNHCR. Experts concede that extremist groups have taken advantage of the disenfranchised Rohingyas to provide foot soldiers for many conflicts around the world. In a 2001 interview with the Pakistani newspaper UMMAT, Osama bin Laden cited a strong jihadi presence “from Bosnia to Sudan, and from

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<sup>34</sup> Lintner, “Bangladesh Extremist Islamist Consolidation,” 4.

Burma to Kashmir.”<sup>35</sup> Intelligence officials believe this is a direct reference to the displaced Rohingya population.

But even the plight of the Rohingyas does not necessarily betray the strong sufi infusion of Islam in Bangladesh. According to Robert Kaplan, the quarter of a million Rohingyas in southeastern Bangladesh have been marginalized by local Chittagong citizens where stories abound of the criminal nature of the Rohingyas. Rumors also persist of Saudi NGOs recruiting Rohingyas for terrorist plots. But, as Kaplan notes, these stories and rumors did not prove that the refugees were criminals, only that they were hated.<sup>36</sup>

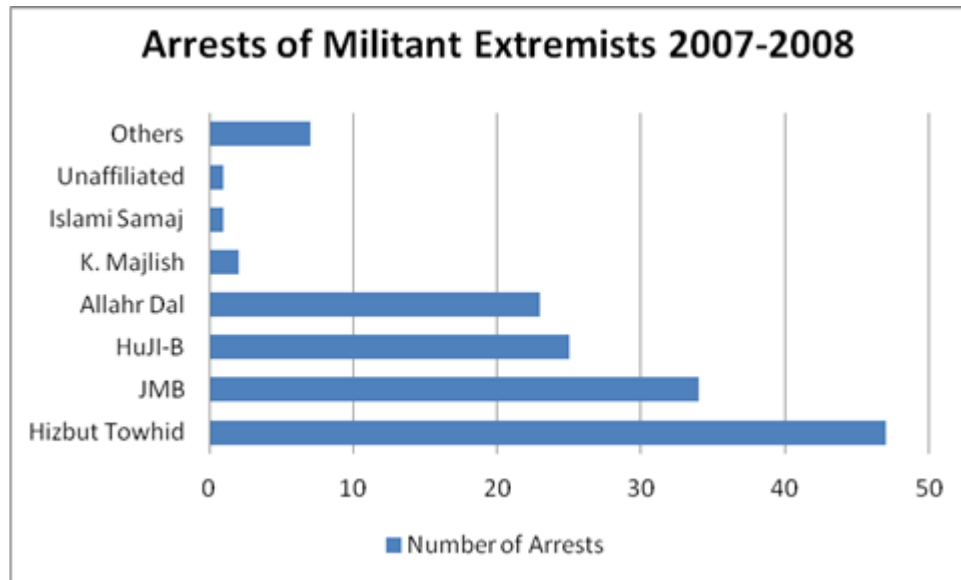


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<sup>35</sup> Lintner, “Bangladesh Extremist Islamist Consolidation,” 5.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Kaplan, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power*, (New York, NY, Random House, 2010), 152.

## BANGLADESH GOVERNMENT RESPONSE



**Figure 4: Arrests of Militant Extremists, Aug 2007 – May 2008 (Source: Zohra Akhtar, “Trends in Militancy in Bangladesh,” in Trends in Militancy in Bangladesh, Possible Responses, edited by Farooq Sobhan, (Dhaka, University Press Ltd, 2010).**

As noted previously, many of the incidents prior to 17 Aug 2005 were simply attributed to political disobedience and the programmatic nature of Bangladeshi opposition politics that sometimes included attempted assassinations and aggressive street politicking. Efforts to combat such violence, while forceful and vigorous, were tempered so that the government would not be viewed as autocratic in nature. While both the Awami League and BNP have made ardent strides in curtailing violent extremist activity, historically, the Awami League has been the more aggressive campaigner against militant extremists due to their staunchly secularist agenda.

The BNP, due to its history of electoral alliances with legitimate Islamic parties, has at times been accused of turning a deaf ear to militant extremist activity. But with mounting national and international pressure following the August 2005 bombings, the ruling BNP took broad steps to ban militant extremist organizations and parties, and in May, 2006, arrested many of the principles, put them on trial, and sentenced them to death.<sup>37</sup> The ensuing caretaker government, established in January 2007 and backed by the Bangladeshi Army, continued these policies of increased pressure on extremist organizations and carried out the actual executions. While seemingly oblivious to levels of extremism that had permeated Bangladeshi society before the August 2005 bombings, both Awami League and BNP governments have, in recent years, confronted militant extremism with vigor.

What the BNP set in motion during their last year in power in 2006 the caretaker government took and implemented without regard for perceptions of political pandering. To their credit, the Awami League, since winning elections in 2009, carried over some counter-extremism policies while also implementing new ones. This coordinated effort led to sweeping reforms, resulting in two significant acts of legislation: the 15 April 2008 Money Laundering Prevention Ordinance, and the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Anti-Terrorism Ordinance of 2008, signed on 18

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<sup>37</sup> Kapur, et al., *Government and Politics in South Asia*, (Philadelphia, Westview Press, 2009) 292.



May, 2008 (see Appendix A).<sup>38</sup> Additionally, the Ministry of Home Affairs proposed to the GOB to set up a cabinet Committee on National Security, a National Security Council, and a Joint Intelligence unit to combat militant extremism.<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, these policies have made great strides in hampering militant extremist activity and quelling much of the violence and brutality that occurred between 1999 and 2005. Furthermore, the execution in 2007 of six senior officials of various militant organizations severely disrupted the command and control elements of JMB and HuJI-B, which still have not fully reconstituted their power base and potency as of this writing. Nevertheless, the GOB has yet to define if militant extremism is a national security imperative or merely an internal law enforcement dilemma. Both left-wing and right-wing extremism has been thus far addressed by the GOB with a short-term, militaristic approach.<sup>40</sup> While the Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorism ordinances go a long way in beginning to address the seriousness of the issue, there has been no adequate long-term strategy put in place to

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<sup>38</sup> As reported in the Bangladesh Gazette on Wednesday, 11 June 2008, no 28 at [https://www.imolin.org/.../Bangladesh/Bangladesh\\_Anti\\_Terrorism\\_Ordinance\\_2008.pdf](https://www.imolin.org/.../Bangladesh/Bangladesh_Anti_Terrorism_Ordinance_2008.pdf) (accessed 20 June 2011).

<sup>39</sup> Interview with senior official at the Bangladesh Institute for Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS). He had first-hand knowledge that the Ministry of Home Affairs had outlined, in a Counter Terrorism Strategy Paper to the caretaker government in 2008, those three recommendations, ostensibly “taking a cue from the U.S. government.” Interview was conducted on 19 May 2011 at the BIPSS headquarters in Dhaka.

<sup>40</sup> Farooq Sobhan et. al., *Countering Terrorism in Bangladesh*, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, (Dhaka, University Press Ltd, 2007), 3.

address the ideological and theological underpinnings of the terrorist narrative.<sup>41</sup>



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<sup>41</sup> Abdur Rob Khan, introduction to *Trends in Militancy in Bangladesh, Possible Responses*, edited by Farooq Sobhan, (Dhaka, University Press Ltd, 2010).

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **BANGLADESHI GOVERNANCE**

Bangladeshi governance, since its inception with the War of Liberation in 1971, has always favored democracy. Specifically, Bangladeshi governance has favored secularist principles within the context of democracy which can be defined as its culture, nationalism, political history, and even religious identity. Between 1972 and 1975, Bangladesh aggressively pursued secularism as a state principle before falling to military rule. From 1975 to 1991, various military dictatorships placed increasingly greater emphasis on Islam within the constitution, judiciary, society and overall culture of the Bangladeshi people. This would be followed by a period from 1991 to 2005 when Bangladesh experienced a wave of militant extremism that raised questions about its moderate posture and the future of secular democracy. During this period even stronger alliances were made with Islamic religio-political figures and organizations.

These alliances, coupled with the rise of militant organizations, still did not tip the scale towards militant extremism until 1999, when targeted violence took on a more organized, focused, and sinister role as the manifestation of right-wing militancy for political gain. Bangladeshi cultural norms, tolerance, and nationalism had, up until that point,

largely kept right-wing extremism at bay. But the fading memory of the War of Liberation diluted the importance of nationalism and secular thought in Bangladeshi political discourse, which in turn allowed for a globalized form of militant extremism to gain influence and ascendancy in both governance and popular culture.<sup>1</sup>

Bangladeshi politics, unfortunately, did not act as a counterweight to this rise in extremism, but served as an accelerant. Democracy's eroding credibility between 1991 and 2005 was characterized by the failings of a two-party system, where both the Awami League and BNP espoused electoral democracy, but suffered from rampant and endemic corruption. This created an atmosphere of political apathy and effectively opened the door for militant ideology as discontent. With secularism and nationalism relegated to the background, and democracy undermined by severe corruption, militant extremism took root and culminated with the bombings in August and November of 2005.<sup>2</sup>

The hypothesis that a functioning democracy is the main factor in checking extremist behavior would unequivocally be false in Bangladesh prior to 2005. That era, whether characterized by democratic or autocratic rule, socialist or secular doctrine, Awami League or BNP, each phase of Bangladesh's governance shared a similar legacy of corruption

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<sup>1</sup> Hossain and Curtis, "Bangladesh: Checking Islamist Extremism in a Pivotal Democracy," 4.

<sup>2</sup> Hossain and Curtis, "Bangladesh: Checking Islamist Extremism in a Pivotal Democracy," 9.

and entitlement.<sup>3</sup> This changed with the military caretaker government of 2007. What distinguished this most recent military take-over from earlier ones is that a majority of Bangladeshis welcomed the 2007 army takeover as a means to cleanse the political process of both corruption and the increasing scourge of militant extremist violence.

In an effort to stave off political disaster and the threat of large-scale riots and bloodshed, the military stepped in and formed a caretaker government in a bloodless coup. The fear, as with earlier military coups, was that the commanding general would then place himself in charge and manipulate the constitution to maintain his seat of power and effectively create a dictatorship. Fortunately, the failures of previous military dictatorships, along with the ongoing, real-life lessons of Pakistan's military authoritarian rule led to widespread calls for democratic elections which eventually took place in December, 2008. While this caretaker government effectively took Bangladesh off the list of recognized democracies, it did have a positive effect on the issues of corruption and quelling extremist violence, areas where the military caretaker government was largely deemed successful.

In an attempt to tackle corruption, the heads of both political parties were arrested on corruption charges, as well as numerous other government bureaucrats and civil sector business leaders. Hailed as

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<sup>3</sup> Hossain and Curtis, "Bangladesh: Checking Islamist Extremism in a Pivotal Democracy," 16.

transformational in nature, this abatement of corruption unfortunately would not last as the judiciary proved ineffectual in prosecuting many of the corruption charges. Indeed, it was reported that the end of the caretaker government saw its own share of corruption by military-backed leaders.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the caretaker's actions to stem the tide of militant extremism were heralded as a resounding success since notable progress was made in arresting and executing militant extremists involved in previous violent activity. As such, the interim government was seen as more active and committed to eradicating the problems of extremism in Bangladesh and laid the foundations for better governance to combat militant extremism.

The Awami League, which won the ensuing elections in December 2008, continued on the path set forth by the caretaker government, and has benefitted from those measures in the way of low-to-nonexistent incidents since 2007. The period of post-2005 to the present has witnessed the crushing of militant extremism as well as a re-secularization of the state in response. While these initiatives are largely tactical in nature (arrests through intelligence gathering and local law enforcement), a few strategic initiatives were introduced, namely the Money Laundering Prevention Ordinance of 2008 and the Anti-Terrorism Ordinance that passed that same year. These initiatives established that

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<sup>4</sup> Rashidul Hasan, "Ministry to Sue Matin for Container Deal: Accused of Gaft, Violation of Constitution," *The Daily Star* (Dhaka, Bangladesh), August 14, 2009.

Bangladesh's government was able to provide security for its citizenry, and thereby elevate Bangladeshi governance as the primary factor in the recent demise in militant extremist violence.

Additionally, the Awami League instituted a four-strand counterterrorism strategy: *prevent, pursue, protect, and prepare*.<sup>5</sup>

Through the anti-terrorism law, banks were empowered to freeze the accounts of suspected terrorists, while terrorism offenses were liable to tougher penalties including the death sentence and life imprisonment. The Bangladesh Supreme Court also played a large role in the quelling of violence during this period. Indeed, Bangladesh has experienced three important judicial interventions which have enhanced the government's ability to counter terrorist activity. The most important development was a verdict on religion and secularization passed by the appellate division of the Supreme Court in July 2010.<sup>6</sup> The court's decision reversed the constitution's 1979 Fifth Amendment which gave legality to military rule and dropped the state principle of secularism, inserting instead certain Islamic values. With this verdict, the Supreme Court effectively reinstated the principles of secularism.

The second development by the Supreme Court was a ban on *Fatwa*. *Fatwa*, interpreted as a religious decree on local arbitration or

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<sup>5</sup> Khan, "Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: Why it Failed to Take Root," 56.

<sup>6</sup> Khan, "Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: Why it Failed to Take Root," 59.

interpretation on aspects of religious law by respected clerics, was now viewed as intrinsically linked to the Islamists' agenda. The spiritual intent of Fatwa is often misunderstood and even more frequently misused, to breach human rights, including rights of women. In the July 2010 verdict, the high court declared illegal an array of extrajudicial punishment including those made in the name of Fatwa in local arbitration.<sup>7</sup>

And finally, the high court in August 2010 provided judicial intervention on matters of 'Islamist attire' and declared illegal the compulsory wearing of the *burqa* by women against their will. Additionally, they ruled that Bangladeshi women are not under compulsion to wear the burqa or religious dress at educational institutions and government offices.<sup>8</sup> The court also ordered the government to ensure that no cultural activities or sports in educational institutions were unavailable to women because of their dress.<sup>9</sup> These three recent legal mandates from the highest judicial court in Bangladesh are significant if not extraordinary when set against the backdrop of more fundamentalist trends in other Muslim-majority countries.

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<sup>7</sup> Khan, "Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: Why it Failed to Take Root," 60.

<sup>8</sup> Khan, "Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: Why it Failed to Take Root," 60.

<sup>9</sup> Khan, "Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: Why it Failed to Take Root," 61.



However successful the interim caretaker government was at combating militant extremism, one of the hazards of that legacy lies in the precedent that it set of suspending the democratic process. This suspension plays directly into the hands of the ideological underpinnings of militant extremism, which questions the validity of democracy and legitimacy of popular sovereignty.<sup>10</sup>

### **STRENGTH OF DEMOCRACY**

The roots of terrorism can take hold and flourish when nourished by a vacuum of leadership and governance. Therefore, it is imperative to capture the strength of Bangladesh's democracy and correlating democratic institutions to determine if Bangladesh has the potential to become a failed state in the way of Afghanistan. Bangladesh illustrates how the kind of government a state has is less important than the degree to which that state is governed, that is, a democracy that cannot secure its people may be worse for human rights than a dictatorship that can.<sup>11</sup> Bangladesh currently has a robust civil society, a vibrant NGO community, an independent judiciary, and active participation by women in government, business, and media.<sup>12</sup> These have contributed to Bangladesh's stability as a sovereign state, with the added benefit of denying extremists a foothold in society. Yet Bangladesh also has a

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<sup>10</sup> Hossain and Curtis, "Bangladesh: Checking Islamist Extremism in a Pivotal Democracy," 5.

<sup>11</sup> Kaplan, *Monsoon*, 145.

<sup>12</sup> Hossain and Curtis, "Bangladesh: Checking Islamist Extremism in a Pivotal Democracy," 3.

number of societal ills that, left unchecked, could undermine its ability to continue on a democratic trajectory and usher in an era of renewed extremist ideology and violence.

The road to state failure is marked by several revealing signposts, one of which is a state's economy. Another is its polity.<sup>13</sup> While an economy is effectively measured by per capita GDP, basic living standards, and availability of basic necessities, polity is generally defined as democratic principles and the ability to provide security, but this is harder to measure for efficacy. In fact, many social scientists agree that these factors go hand-in-hand, equating democracy with development, and capitalism with political freedom. The country of Bangladesh, using this metric, belies both assumptions and would meet some of the standards of a failing state. It is a reasonably free society with a fledgling democracy, all the while being one of the world's poorest economies with the world's 200<sup>th</sup> lowest per capita GDP of \$1,500US.<sup>14</sup>

Bangladesh, then, has the very real possibility of becoming a failed state, with all of the social ills and transnational terror connotations that go along with that title. The metric does not, however, account for the will of the people and their desire for civil society. This capacity, commonly acknowledged as "tenacity," is a measurable factor in state

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Rotberg, "Failed States in a World of Terror," *Council on Foreign Relations*, July/August 2002, 2.

<sup>14</sup> CIA World Factbook, 2010, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bg.html> (accessed October 25, 2010).

cohesion.<sup>15</sup> Tenacity notwithstanding, Bangladesh still has the potential to be labeled or qualified as a weak state (as measured by world standards such as per capita GDP, the UN's Human Development Index, or even Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index). Currently, Bangladesh does not appear to be in any immediate danger of becoming a failed state as its government is credible, civil war is absent, and political goods are being provided in sufficient quantities and qualities.<sup>16</sup>

The desire for civil society and democratic independence is a familiar theme and appears to be part of the Bangladeshi cultural ethos since gaining independence through the War of Liberation in 1971. The very origins of Bangladesh, as East Pakistan fighting for ethnic solidarity over Islamic unity with West Pakistan, laid the foundation for an independent democracy and civil stability. That stability has been tested through numerous military coups, but the will of the people has been steadfast that democracy, not autocracy, will be the rule of the land. However, like many Muslim-majority nations, Bangladesh continues to struggle, even more so after 9/11, to define the role of Islam in society, culture, and governance. This, coupled with Bangladesh's historical

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<sup>15</sup> Joel Migdal, *Strong States and Weak States, State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World*, (United Kingdom, Princeton University Press, 1988), 35.

<sup>16</sup> Rotberg, "Failed States in a World of Terror," 5, 7.

misgivings of colonial rule, are two issues that militant extremists continually attempt to exploit for their agenda.

To simply fault colonialism (first by the British, and then by West Pakistan), however, would be incorrect. While colonialism presents a major obstacle to institutional or infrastructural success, the reasons for dropping into state failure are more complicated. British colonial rule is also cited as an important influence in the formulation of the syncretistic nature of Islam in Bangladesh. Such syncretism works as powerful resistance to religious extremism and creates an environment of coexistence of different religions and faiths in the region.<sup>17</sup> Instead, destructive decisions by individual leaders appear to be the underlying cause for most failed states today.<sup>18</sup> Bangladesh's own history is replete with strong, principled leaders that helped found the country and have kept failure and collapse at bay, mired with periods of kleptocratic rule and military coups that have stunted economic progress and democratic growth.

Another concept for assessing Bangladesh's degree of weakness or potential for failure is whether "state" is an appropriate categorization for Bangladesh at all. The concept of "failed states" is a flawed argument that presupposes the concept of states as sovereign and having the

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<sup>17</sup> Khan, "Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: Why it Failed to Take Root," 54.

<sup>18</sup> Rotberg, "Failed States in a World of Terror," 2.

intrinsic ability, with sovereignty, to succeed.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the current focus on restoring “failed states” to the status of “successful states” through a range of short- and long-term nation-building efforts may be a misguided approach doing more harm than good. The very concept of “state” is a relatively new phenomenon, and many “failed states” were never “successful” to begin with and have no reference for success. Indeed, perhaps not all states will, or should, survive in their current form.<sup>20</sup>

This argument, however, does not address the two main fallouts of a failed state: the humanitarian and international security implications. The ensuing poverty, disease, violence, and flow of refugees as well as illicit economic activity and terrorist sanctuary problems will still need to be addressed by the international community in any failed state or non-state scenario. Therefore, the current state system is better equipped to organize and provide aid or sanctions. As such, Bangladesh’s own statehood and democracy must be placed under scrutiny to assess its effectiveness and ability to counter militant extremism.

A case study of Pakistan shows that inequality and underdevelopment has led to much of the violent extremism found in their society today, in addition to mis-governance. Specifically, Pakistan illustrates that democracy may have little impact on rampant income

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<sup>19</sup> Rosa Ehrenreich Brooks, “Failed States, or the State as a Failure?”, *University of Chicago Law Review*, vol 72, no 4 (Fall 2005), 1159.

<sup>20</sup> Brooks, “Failed States, or the State as a Failure?”, 1160.

inequality.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, increased political rights had a significant negative impact on fiscal expenditures, and created an increase in the disparity between the rich and poor in Pakistan.<sup>22</sup> This income inequality is cited as the underlying reason for violent extremism, as opposed to ineffective governance.

### **ROLE OF NGOs**

While not an NGO in the traditional sense, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in Bangladesh is one of the largest distributors of foreign aid in the region. Currently, it manages two large-scale projects in Bangladesh: a police training academy in Rajshahi designed to educate local authorities on counter-terrorism initiatives and projects in order to provide baseline education reform of Bangladesh's madrasa school system.<sup>23</sup> While USAID has made significant inroads in curbing poverty and offering solutions for economic subsistence, other Nongovernmental Organizations (NGO) have played an even larger stabilizing role in Bangladesh.

NGOs have been in place in Bangladesh since independence in 1971. However, in the late 1980s, NGOs gained prominence with an increasing role of delivering basic services where the government failed to

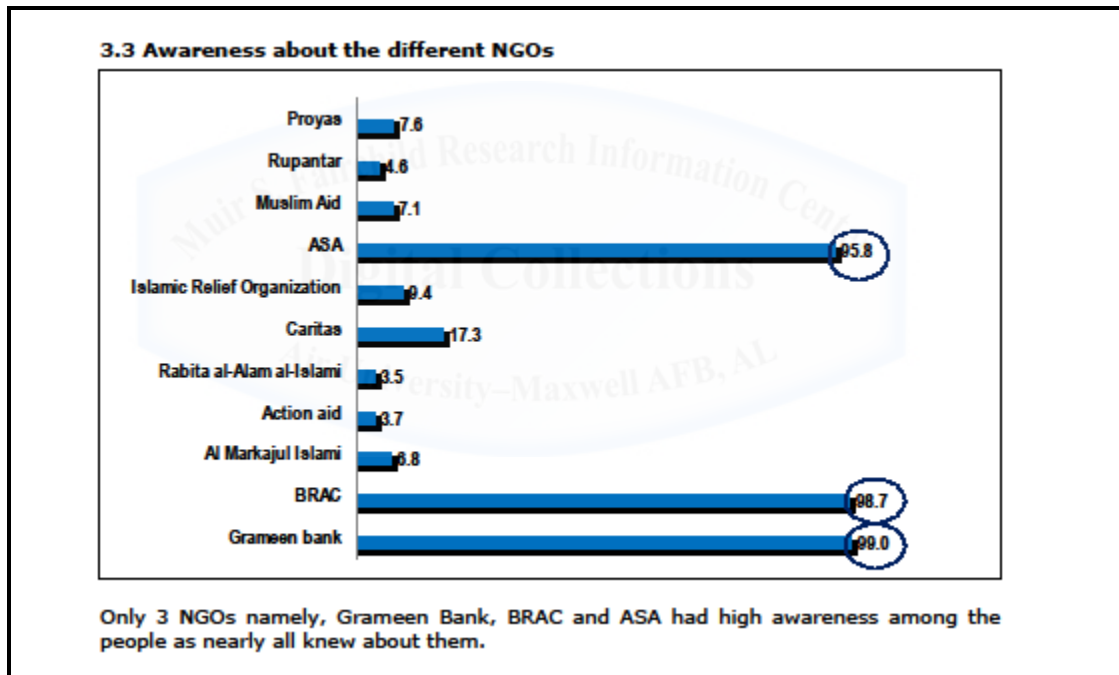
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<sup>21</sup> Rafi Amir-ud-Din, Rashid, Abdul and Shabbir, Ahmad, "Democracy, Inequality and Economic Development: The Case of Pakistan," *Munich Personal RePEc Archive*, No 26935, November 2010 at <http://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/26935/> (Accessed 29 March 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Amir-ud-Din, "Democracy, Inequality and Economic Development: The Case of Pakistan."

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Ms. Meghan W.T. Nalbo, USAID representative, U.S. Embassy, Dhaka. Interview was conducted on 18 May 2011.

do so, namely in poor and rural areas. Specifically, many of the NGOs embarked on income-generating micro-credit partnerships targeted towards rural women in an effort to provide them with seed money to start businesses.<sup>24</sup> What initially began as a basic attempt to involve women in economic activities grew into an influential and significant avenue of self-empowerment. As such, NGOs have become so ingrained in Bangladeshi culture that over 95% of the population knows of their existence and the work that they are engaged in (Figure 3-1).



**Figure 5: Awareness of Different NGOs (Source: Vulnerable Population Survey (Rajshahi group), March 2011, 13.)**

Through a bottom-up approach, NGOs have helped to decrease the population growth rate from 7 percent per year after independence to 1.5

<sup>24</sup> Riaz, *God Willing, The Politics of Islamism in Bangladesh*, 121.

percent today.<sup>25</sup> This is an unprecedented achievement given the value placed on children as almost a form of social security in the form of labor in a traditional agrarian society. Polio has been nearly eradicated several times, failing only because of cross-border reinfections from India. Bangladesh has also risen from a state of famine in the mid-1970s to a nation that now feeds itself. Much of the credit goes to the role of NGOs which in Bangladesh connotes a new organizational life-form that fills the chasm between a remote, badly-functioning central government and village communities.<sup>26</sup>

According to Kaplan, NGOs would not have the influence they do in Bangladesh villages without a moderate, syncretic form of Islam that empowers women as capable wage earners.<sup>27</sup> But a poor country that can't afford to say no to money, especially through unregulated and ungoverned organizations, can just as easily fall prey to al-Qaeda affiliates which, like westernized NGOs are another sub-state phenomenon filling the vacuum created by weak central government.

The main NGOs recognized by the average Bangladeshi citizen are Grameen Bank (one of the first to implement the micro-credit initiative, for which the founder/director, Dr. Muhammad Yunus, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006), Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC),

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<sup>25</sup> Kaplan, *Monsoon*, 141.

<sup>26</sup> Kaplan, *Monsoon*, 142.

<sup>27</sup> Kaplan, *Monsoon*, 143.



and the Association for Social Advancement (ASA – which means “hope” in Bangla). As these NGOs targeted women for social and economic empowerment, they drew the ire of militant extremists, who asserted that they posed a threat to the traditional family role of women in Bangladesh. Wrapped in these accusations were three points of contention between clerics and the NGOs: the role of women, credit, and education.<sup>28</sup>

Examined within the rural power structure of Bangladesh, these three topics easily encroach upon the fragile patron-client relationships of a poor, rural society. Within the rural community, a small segment of the population may control much of the arable farmland and resources, and effectively occupy the position as patron, while the remainder of the community is composed of clients in that relationship. Rural clerics play a critical role in this dynamic, as they fulfill dual roles of providing legitimacy to the structure of the relationship as well as acting as “moral guardians” derived from their supposed knowledge of Islamic tradition and scripture.<sup>29</sup> NGOs are considered to be a direct threat to that power structure, where women are often subjugated and relegated to submissive roles, more as a function of culture than Islamic doctrine or practice. Instead, the developmental agenda of NGOs required women to

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<sup>28</sup> Riaz, *God Willing, The Politics of Islamism in Bangladesh*, 123.

<sup>29</sup> Riaz, *God Willing, The Politics of Islamism in Bangladesh*, 124.

be full participants, visible and involved in the process, effectively giving them resources and voices they never had.<sup>30</sup>

The issue of credit speaks to the socioeconomic empowerment of women that began impinging on the traditional dynamics of the authority relationship in families. Secondary to this, credit also broached an ideological standpoint of Islamic finance, where credit involving interest payments are expressly forbidden (*haram*). Finally, the role of education presented the most potent threat to extremist sensibilities. Numerous NGOs, most prominently BRAC, began to institute informal educational programs in addition to targeted aid and subsistence programs that competed directly with the Qawmi (privately funded) madrasa systems in rural areas.<sup>31</sup> More importantly, they also competed with the knowledge and authority of the local clerics.

While seemingly forever at odds with various elements of Bangladeshi society, NGOs overall have had a dramatic stabilizing force for Bangladesh's mostly rural civic societies. They have filled the void of government incapacity to provide basic services from health care, banking, education, and social programs that serve to provide poor, rural, citizens with an outlet for empowerment.

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<sup>30</sup> Riaz, *God Willing, The Politics of Islamism in Bangladesh*, 124.

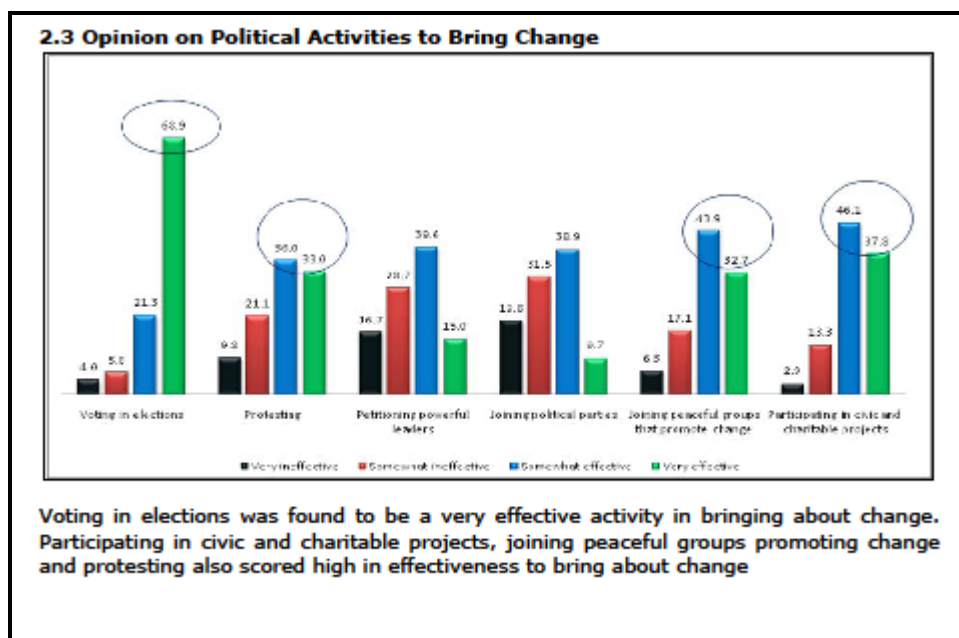
<sup>31</sup> Qawmi madrasas are privately-funded seminary schools, unregulated by the GOB, that tend to focus more on religious scholarship to the detriment of social and engineering sciences. Alia madrasas, conversely, are GOB-run seminary schools that include not only Arabic and Qu'ranic studies, but also English, math, science, and elementary vocational skills.

## **VULNERABLE POPULATION SURVEY**

Perhaps the most recent data (at the time of this writing) available on Bangladeshi perceptions of government efficacy, democracy, security, and perceptions on violence and extremism are found in a March 2011 survey conducted for the US Embassy, Dhaka by the Nielson Company.<sup>32</sup> It contains useful information about the latest attitudes of the average Bangladeshi citizen towards politics, economics, safety and security, violence, corruption, and trust of governance. Part one of the report, provided in Appendix B, measures the current cultural ethos in Bangladesh's Northeast division of Rajshahi; it is similar to another vulnerable population survey done in the Dhaka division which yielded similar findings.

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<sup>32</sup> "Vulnerable Population Survey (Rajshahi group)," March 2011, conducted by The Nielson Company, Bangladesh. The report was briefed to U.S. Ambassador James Moriarty on 18 May, 2011 by USPACOM representatives from the U.S. Embassy in Dhaka. The full survey is in Appendix B.



**Figure 6: Opinion on Political Activities to Bring Change (Source: Vulnerable Population Survey (Rajshahi group), March 2011, 9.)**

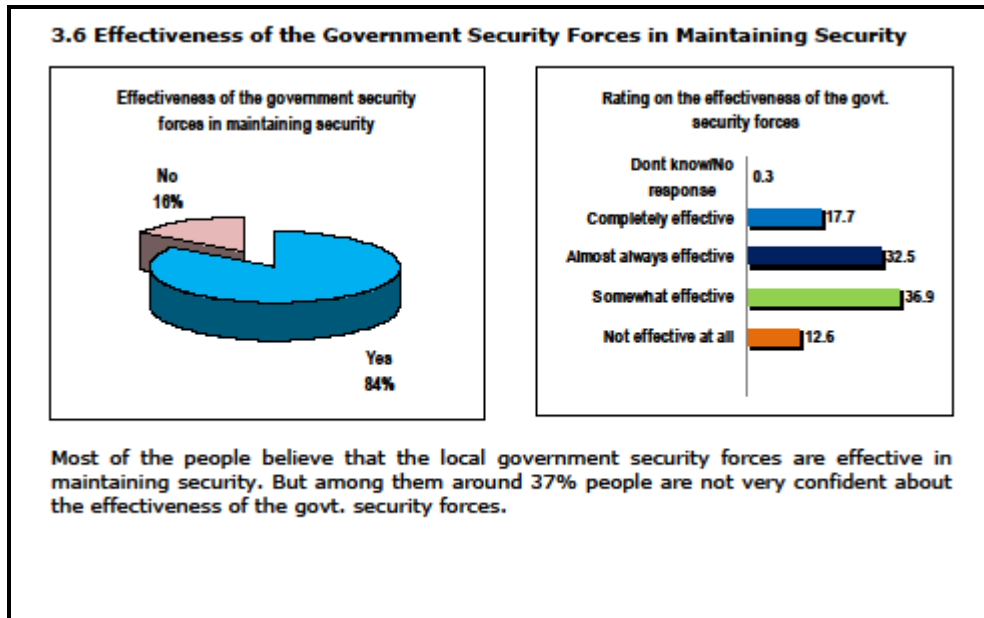
One of the most telling aspects of the survey questioned people's perception of voting in elections. Not only did a majority of those surveyed state that they want to, and do, vote, but they also felt that their individual voting power was the most effective tool in bringing about change in society. Almost 69% of those polled cited "Voting in Elections" as more effective to bringing about change than "Protesting" (33%). In the same category, a majority of respondents (77%) believed that joining peaceful groups that promote change was an effective way to bring about change (Figure 3-2). This illustrates that they feel they have an outlet for their voice to be heard within the confines of a democratic system, perhaps alleviating the need to resort to extremist measures. The

converse to this outlet is relative deprivation, where value standards and, specifically, power values, as a subset, are salient precedents for political violence and militant extremism.<sup>33</sup> The desire, ability, and action of voting, and thus being able to participate in collective decision-making, are powerful psychological satisfactions which serve to deny the extremist ideological alternative of violence.

The perception of the ability of the government to provide security was another key indicator for the argument that effective governance is important to Bangladesh's current low levels of militant extremism (Figure 3-3), with 84% of the Rajshahi division's population responding in the positive.

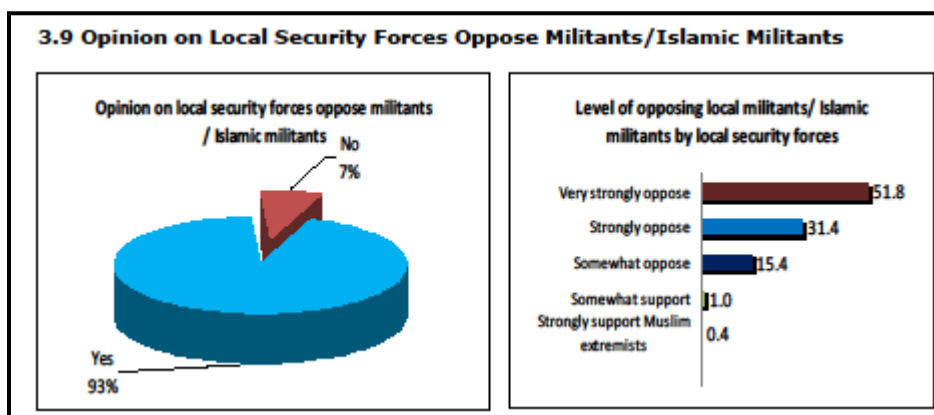
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<sup>33</sup> Ted Robert Gurr, "Relative Deprivation and the Impetus to Violence," *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton University Press, 1970) 25-26.



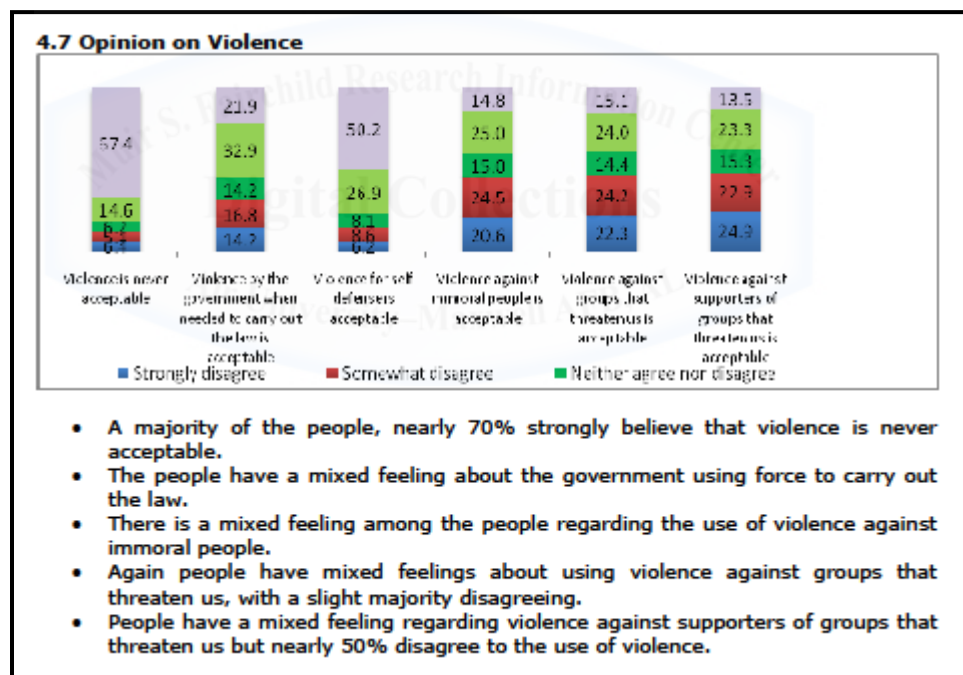
**Figure 7: Effectiveness of the Government Security Forces in Maintaining Security (Source: Vulnerable Population Survey (Rajshahi group), March 2011, 14.)**

Similarly, when asked about the ability of local security forces to oppose militants, an overwhelming 93% responded positively, reflecting their perception that militant extremist levels in 2011 are low-to-nonexistent (Figure 3-4).



**Figure 8: Opinion of the Ability of Local Security Forces to Oppose Militants (Source: Vulnerable Population Survey (Rajshahi group), March 2011, 15.)**

Finally, in a question on violence, respondents gave a glimpse of how Bangladesh's historical and social dynamics are fundamentally loaded against militant extremist violence: 70% strongly believe that violence is never acceptable. However, there are mixed feelings regarding the use of violence against immoral people (14.8% agree, while 45% either disagree, or strongly disagree) (Figure 3-5). Denying militant extremists the ability to control that narrative, of determining who is “immoral” and who is not, is a strategic imperative for the Bangladeshi government and civil society.



**Figure 9: Opinion on Violence (Vulnerable Population Survey (Rajshahi group), March 2011, 20.)**

## CONCLUSIONS

After being swept by a six-year wave of violence from militant extremists, Bangladesh was forced in 2005 to reconcile its own polity with that of its identity as a Muslim-majority nation. Historically, the coalescence of Bangladeshi cultural identity with its Islamic orthodoxy evolved into an organic harmony, richly infused with Sufism and local mores. Emboldened by the backdrop of a fledgling democracy rife with corruption, militant extremists sought to fracture that traditionally harmonious relationship by introducing their ideology of division: Muslim first or Bengali first.<sup>34</sup> The relative ease with which the GOB's counter-terrorism campaign vanquished this outbreak of extremist violence demonstrated the militants had misunderstood Islam and modernity in the Bangladeshi context. This study ventured to determine if the ensuing void in extremist ideology and violence was a function of democracy and governance, Bangladeshi cultural identity, the role of NGOs, its geography, or some combination of these factors.

As a precursor to the analysis, the historical analysis provided a brief introduction of Bangladesh's history, outlining how Islam came to the region and how it differed in practice from Pakistan and Afghanistan. Particularly telling was the anthropological data which differentiates

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<sup>34</sup> Hossain, "Broken Pendulum, Bangladesh's Swing to Radicalism," 5.



peoples of varying topographical regions, from hilly or mountainous, to those of plains and low-lying areas. This ethnography set the stage for Bengali culture, ethnicity, and its outlook towards the rest of the world. Chapter 1 also gave an overview of Bangladesh's political history, its culture, and its geography.

Next, the study examined the rise of militancy, specifically in the context of two watershed events, the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet-Afghan War, and their roles as triggers to extremist ideology in Bangladesh. Government response to extremist ideology and militant organizations played a key factor in the current low-levels of violence enjoyed by the population. The restoration of democracy in 2008, after a military-backed caretaker government, was also a positive and stabilizing force for the country. Yet Bangladesh needs to go further in strengthening its democratic institutions and developing a culture of transparency which encourages accountability and eschews corruption.

Strength of government was crucial to this analysis since failed states have the potential for becoming incubators of extremist ideology and violence. While this study posits that Bangladesh will continue to be a functioning democracy, without stronger democratic institutions the potential exists for Bangladesh to become an illiberal democracy. In lieu of strong governmental institutions, NGOs have fulfilled a critical role in empowering the mostly rural, poor populace. Their activity served as one

of the greatest stabilizing forces for Bangladesh, but NGOs have also been identified as one of the factors stimulating militant extremism. Extremists target NGOs and their Western influence that, in their narrative, attacks the traditional family and authority structure of Bangladeshi society. Finally, a recent Vulnerable Population Survey outlines the latest sentiments of the Bangladeshi population with regards to key factors such as safety and security, attitudes toward governance, and cultural bias for or against extremist ideology.

At the strategic level, Bangladeshi cultural identity appears as the single greatest factor in combating violent extremism and quelling the tide of would-be extremist movements in Bangladesh. Operationally, the government, through effective and democratic governance, has been successful in identifying, capturing, and killing key leaders of terrorist organizations, thus effectively marginalizing militant organizations and their ability to organize and conduct terrorist acts. The confluence of these factors, culture and secular governance, in addition to Bangladesh's geography, led to success in combating extremism and resilience against militant extremist ideology.

Bangladesh, being historically similar to Afghanistan and Pakistan, could easily have fallen prey to Islamist ideology from its infancy as a nation. Instead, cultural awareness, language, and secularism ruled the day and set the stage for modern-day Bangladesh. Early attempts to

“radicalize” Bangladeshi culture and “restore” Islamic purity ultimately presuppose the same flawed arguments that early leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt attempted to do in the Middle East:<sup>35</sup> so-called restoration that comes at the expense of the society’s actual historical and cultural legacies.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, Bangladesh shunned Islamist ideology early on, and through an intermittent yet functioning democracy has continued to be a tolerant and civil society.

The resurgence of extremist ideology in the past decade has also met deep resistance in the form of tough governmental controls and democratic leadership, effectively keeping it at bay. As such, the government’s demonstrated ability to provide a semblance of security qualifies it as a weak state rather than a failing one. Given the latest democratic election, Bangladesh, even as a weak state, has the potential to further increase its political stability and lay stronger foundations for economic prosperity as opposed to 2007 when it fell under military rule and marshal law and lay at the precipice of failure.

To succeed, Bangladesh must go back to its historical roots where culture and democracy ruled seamlessly within the bounds of a Muslim state. Therefore, Bangladesh falls squarely within the assertion that

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<sup>35</sup> Carl L. Brown, *Religion and State, The Muslim Approach to Politics*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 2000), 150.

<sup>36</sup> Hossain, “The Road to a Sharia State? Cultural Radicalization in Bangladesh,” 2.

preventing states from failing is a strategic and moral imperative.<sup>37</sup> Left unchecked, without international encouragement and targeted aid, Bangladesh has the very real potential of becoming a failed state which would create a target rich environment for extremist groups to recruit from and do their bidding. From rampant corruption to extreme overpopulation to catastrophic natural disasters, Bangladesh seems forever at odds to lift its global footing, trading its post-colonial status under British rule for neo-colonialism under the paradox of globalization. Within this local context, Bangladesh must continue its path of democracy and continue its culturally inclusive principles if it is to keep extremists at bay.

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<sup>37</sup> Rotberg, "Failed States in a World of Terror,"1.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **People's Republic of Bangladesh Anti-Terrorism Ordinance (ATO), 2008<sup>38</sup>**

An Ordinance to provide for prevention and effective punishment of certain terrorist acts and matters connected therewith. Whereas it is expedient and necessary to provide for prevention and effective punishment of certain terrorist acts and matters connected therewith; and as the parliament has been dissolved and the President considers that the prevailing situation requires immediate action; The President is pleased to enact and notify the following ordinance by the power conferred at Para 93 (I) of the Constitution of People's Republic of Bangladesh.

#### **Chapter 1 Preamble**

##### **Section 1: Short title, extent and commencement**

- (1) This Ordinance may be called the Anti-Terrorism Ordinance-2008.
- (2) It extends to the whole of Bangladesh
- (3) It shall come into force immediately.

##### **Section 2: Definitions**

Unless there is anything repugnant to the subject or context in this Ordinance:

- (1) "Offence" means an offence punishable under this Ordinance.
- (2) "Fire-arms" includes pistol, revolver, rifle, gun or canon of any description, and any other fire-arm.
- (3) "Court" means the Court of Sessions Judge or Additional Sessions Judge, as the case may be.
- (4) "Imprisonment" means imprisonment of any description as defined in the Article 53 of Penal Code.

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<sup>38</sup> As reported in the Bangladesh Gazette on Wednesday, 11 June 2008, no 28 at [https://www.imolin.org/.../Bangladesh/Bangladesh\\_Anti\\_Terrorism\\_Ordinance\\_2008.pdf](https://www.imolin.org/.../Bangladesh/Bangladesh_Anti_Terrorism_Ordinance_2008.pdf) (accessed 20 june 20011).

- (5) Criminal Procedure or the Code means Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898(Act V of 1898).
- (6) Schedule means Schedule under this Ordinance.
- (7) “Penal Code” means the Penal Code, 1860 (Act XLV of 1860).
- (8) “Inflammable substance” means any substance that has high propensity to be set on fire, or to intensify or spread fire such as octane, petrol, diesel, compressed natural gas(CNG), gunpowder and also includes any other inflammable substance.
- (9) “Bangladesh Bank” means the Bangladesh Bank established under the Bangladesh Bank Order, (P. O. No. 127 of 1972).
- (10) “Bank” means any Banking Company established under the Bank Companies Act, 1991(Act No. 14 of 1991) and any financial or commercial institutions authorized by any other law to take or disburse loan, or to exchange money shall also include.
- (11) “Judge” means a Sessions Judge, an Additional Sessions Judge or, as the case may be the Judge of an Anti- Terrorism Special Tribunal.
- (12) “Special Tribunal” means an Anti-Terrorism Special Tribunal established under section 28.
- (13) “Explosive Substance” – means (a) gunpowder, nitro-glycerin, dynamite, gun-cotton, blasting powders, fulminate of mercury or of other metals, coloured fires and every other substance, whether similar to those above-mentioned or not, used or manufactured with a view to producing a practical effect by explosion, or a pyrotechnic effect; and (b) includes any materials for making any explosive substance; also any apparatus, machine implement or material used, or intended to be used, or adapted for causing, or aiding in causing any explosion in or with any explosive substance; also any part of any such apparatus, machine or implement; and fuses, rockets, percussion caps, detonators, cartridges, ammunition of all descriptions.
- (14) “Property” means property of every description, whether corporeal or incorporeal, moveable or immoveable, tangible or intangible and profit derived from such property, and includes money or negotiable instruments capable of being converted into money.
- (15) “Evidence Act” means Evidence Act, 1872(Act 1 of 1872).

### **Section 3: Interpretations**

- (1) Words and expressions used but not defined in this Ordinance , but defined in the Code or Penal Code, shall have the meaning respectively assigned to them in the Code or Penal Code , as the case may be.

(2) The general provisions of Penal Code regarding punishments and criminal liability shall apply to offences under this Ordinance, so far as not inconsistent with the relevant expressed provisions of this Ordinance.

#### **Section 4: Ordinance to override all other laws**

The provisions of this Ordinance shall have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the Code or in any other law for the time being in force.

#### **Section 5: Extra territorial application of the Ordinance**

(1) Whoever commits an offence beyond Bangladesh against any national or property of Bangladesh, which, if committed in Bangladesh would have punishable under this ordinance, shall be dealt with according to the provisions of this Ordinance in the same manner as if such offence had been committed in Bangladesh.

(2) Whoever commits an offence within Bangladesh from beyond Bangladesh shall be dealt with according to the provisions of this Ordinance in the same manner as if the whole process of such offence had been committed in Bangladesh.

(3) Whoever commits an offence beyond Bangladesh from within Bangladesh, shall be dealt with according to the provisions of this Ordinance in the same manner as if the whole process of such offence had been committed in Bangladesh

### **Chapter 2 Crime and Punishment**

#### **Section 6:**

(1) Terrorist acts mean striking terror in the people or any section of the people in order to compel the Government of Bangladesh or any other person to do or abstain from doing any act with intent to threaten the unity, solidarity, security or sovereignty of Bangladesh through a) Killing, injuring grievously, abducting a person or causing damage to the property of a person; or b) Possessing or using explosives, inflammable

substance, firearms, or any other chemical to achieve the purpose of sub section (a).

(2) Whoever commits terrorist act shall be punished with death or imprisonment for life or to a maximum 20 years and not less than 3 years rigorous imprisonment, to which fine may be added.

### **Section 7:**

(1) Whoever provides or incites to provide money, service or property and intends that it should be used, or has reasonable ground to suspect that it will or may be used for the purpose of terrorist acts; commits an act of terrorist financing.

(2) Whoever receives money, service or property and intends that it should be used, or has reasonable ground to suspect that it will or may be used for the purpose of terrorist acts; commits an act of terrorist financing.

(3) Whoever arranges money, service or property and intends that it should be used, or has reasonable ground to suspect that it will or may be used for the purpose of terrorist acts; commits an act of terrorist financing.

(4) A person guilty of the offence as described in the subsections from 1 to 3 shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to twenty years and it shall not be less than three years , to which fine may also be added.

### **Section 8:**

Membership of a proscribed organization: Whoever belongs or professes to belong to an organization proscribed under section 18, will be guilty of offence, and shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to six months, or with fine, or with both.

### **Section 9: Support for proscribed organization**

(1) Whoever solicits or invites support for proscribed organization or arranges, conducts or assists in conducting meeting or addresses a meeting to further and encourage the activities of the proscribed organization commits an offence.

(2) Whoever addresses a meeting seeking support for a proscribed organization or disseminates information through radio, television or



print or electronic media to activate the organization's activities commits an offence.

(3) A person guilty of an offence under sub section 1 or 2 shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to maximum seven years and not less than two years and in addition to this fine may also be imposed.

#### **Section 10: Punishment for conspiring to commit offence**

Whoever makes conspiracy to commit offence under this ordinance shall be punished with imprisonment of any description provided for the offence, for a term which may extend to two thirds of the longest term of imprisonment provided for that offence, or with fine, or with both; and if punishment of death is provided for that offence, the punishment may extend to imprisonment for life or imprisonment for a term extending up to fourteen years, but not less than five years.

#### **Section 11: Punishment for attempting to commit offence**

Whoever attempts to commit offence under this ordinance shall be punished with imprisonment of any description provided for the offence, for a term which may extend to two thirds of the longest term of imprisonment provided for that offence, or with fine, or with both; and if punishment of death is provided for that offence, the punishment may extend to imprisonment for life or imprisonment for a term extending up to fourteen years, but not less than five years.

#### **Section 12: Punishment for abetment of offence**

Whoever abets committing any offence punishable under this ordinance shall be punished with the punishment fixed for that offence.

#### **Section 13: Punishment for instigating to commit terrorist acts**

Whoever by his voluntary acts or participation instigates any terrorist act by providing any equipment, input or technology or training to any person or organization knowing that such person or organization shall, or will try to, use that equipment, input, technology or training for commission of any terrorist act, shall be deemed to have attempted to instigate a terrorist act, and shall be punished with imprisonment of any

description provided for the offence of terrorist act, as may be relevant , for a term which may extend to two thirds of the longest term of imprisonment provided for that offence, or with such fine as is provided for the offence, or with both; and if punishment of death is provided for that offence, the punishment may extend to imprisonment for life or imprisonment for a term extending upto fourteen years, but not less than five years.

#### **Section 14: Harboursing of offenders**

(1) Whoever harbours or conceals a person whom he knows or has reason to believe to be the offender under this ordinance, with an intention to protect him from punishment, shall: A) if the offence is punishable with death, be punished with not more than five years, and in addition to that fine may also be imposed; or B) If the offence is punishable with imprisonment for life or with any description of imprisonment, be punished with maximum three years imprisonment, and to which fine may also be added.

(2) This offence of harbouring or concealing the offender under subsection (1) shall not extend to the husband, wife, son, daughter, father or mother of the offender.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Section 15: Power of Bangladesh Bank**

(1) The Bangladesh Bank shall have the power and authority to take necessary measures to prevent and detect transaction intended to commit offence under this ordinance through any banking channel , and for that matter is empowered and authorized to

- a) Call for reports about suspicious transactions from a bank and shall keep such report confidential if law does not allow disclosure.
- b) Compile and preserve all statistics and records.
- c) Create and maintain a database of all suspicious transaction reports.
- d) Analyze the suspicious transaction reports.
- e) Issue an order in writing to any bank to suspend a transaction for a period of 30 days where it has reasonable grounds to suspect that the transaction involves connection with terrorist acts, and extend the order so passed for another 30 days.

- f) Monitor and observe the activities of the banks.
  - g) Issue instructions to banks directing them to take preventive measures against terrorist financing activities.
  - h) Inspect banks for the purpose of detection of suspicious transactions connected with terrorist financing.
  - i) Provide training to staffs and officers of banks for the purpose of detection and prevention of suspicious transactions as may be connected with terrorist financing.
- (2) As soon as Bangladesh Bank will detect any suspicious transaction connected with terrorist financing of a bank or its customers, it shall inform the appropriate law enforcement authorities of that and shall extend all necessary cooperation to that agency regarding enquiry and investigation
- (3) No law enforcement authority shall have any access to the documents or files of a bank without approval from the chief executive of the concerned bank or from Bangladesh Bank.

#### **Section 16: Duty of Banks**

- (1) Every bank shall take necessary measures with due vigilance and diligence to detect and prevent transactions connected with offence under this ordinance through banking channel.
- (2) The Board of Directors of every Bank shall approve and issue instructions to be observed by the officers of the bank, and shall also ensure the compliance of the instructions issued by the Bangladesh Bank under section 15 of this ordinance.
- (3) Any bank failing to comply with any instruction issued by Bangladesh Bank under section 15 shall be liable to pay such fine as may be determined directed by Bangladesh Bank not exceeding taka 10 lac.

### **Chapter 4 Terrorist Organization**

#### **Section 17: Organization involved in terrorist acts**

For the purpose of this ordinance, an organization is involved in terrorist acts, if it

- a) Commits or participates in terrorist acts;
- b) Prepares for terrorist acts;

- c) Abets or encourages terrorist acts;
- d) Supports or assists any organization concerned with terrorist acts;
- e) Is otherwise concerned in terrorist acts.

### **Section 18:**

(1) Proscription of organization; To meet the objectives of this ordinance, the Government, having reasonable ground to believe that an organization is involved in terrorist acts, may proscribe the organization listing it in the schedule.

(2) The Government may, by order, add or remove an organization from the schedule or amend it in any other way.

### **Section 19: Review**

(1) Where any proscribed organization is aggrieved by the order of the Government made under section 18, it may, within thirty days of such order, file an application for review in writing before the Government, stating the grounds on which it is made, and the Government shall, after hearing the applicant, decide the matter within ninety days of receipt of the application.

(2) An organization whose application for review has been refused under subsection (1) may file an appeal to the High Court Division within thirty days of the order of refusal.

(3) The Government shall, through Gazette Notification, appoint a three member Review Committee to determine applications for review under subsection (1).

### **Section 20:**

(1) When an organization is proscribed, Government shall, besides other steps described in the ordinance,

- a) Seal its offices, if any.
- b) Freeze its bank account and seize its other accounts, if any.
- c) Seize all sorts of leaflets, posters, banners, or printed, electronic, digital or other materials;
- d) Prohibit publication, printing or dissemination of any press statements, press conferences or addressing the public by or on behalf of or in support of a proscribed organization.

(2) The proscribed organization shall submit all accounts of its income and expenditure and disclose all the sources of income to the competent authority designated for the purpose by the Government.

(3) Funds and assets of the proscribed organization shall be confiscated in favour of the state if found to be obtained illegally or used for offence under this ordinance.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Investigation of the offences**

#### **Section 21: Special provisions regarding examination of witness by police**

(1) If a police officer, while investigating an offence under this ordinance, finds it necessary to interrogate a person acquainted with the facts and circumstances of the case and if such person is known or believed to be sufficiently able to state facts in writing, then that police officer may receive statement from that person in writing.

(2) Such person shall write his statement by his own hand with pen and sign.

#### **Section 22: Special provisions regarding recording of statements of witness by Magistrate**

If a Metropolitan Magistrate, Magistrate of the First Class, or Magistrate of the second class specially empowered for this purpose is informed or has reasonable ground to believe that a person acquainted with the facts and circumstances of the case is sufficiently able to state facts in writing, he (Magistrate) may require that person to write down the statements by his own hand with pen.

#### **Section 23: Special provisions regarding recording of confession of the accused**

Any Metropolitan Magistrate, Magistrate of the First Class, or Magistrate of the second class specially empowered for this purpose, while recording any confession made to him by an accused, shall permit him to make the confessional statements by his own hand with pen, if such person is able and interested.

## **Section 24:**

(1) Time for investigation; the police officer shall conclude investigation of a case under this ordinance within thirty days of receipt or recording of the information under section 154 of the Code.

(2) If the police officer can not conclude investigation within the time specified in subsection (1), he may, recording the reason in writing in the diary of the case, extend the time not exceeding fifteen days.

(3) If the police officer can not conclude the investigation within the extended time specified in sub-section (2), he may, with written approval of the Superintendent of Police of the district, or, as the case may be, the concerned Deputy Police Commissioner in a metropolitan area, further extend the time not exceeding thirty days.

(4) If the police officer can not conclude the investigation within the further extended time specified in subsection (3), he shall immediately report the fact stating the reason, to the Superintendent of Police of the district, or in the applicable case, the concerned Deputy Police Commissioner in the metropolitan area, and if the mentioned reasons are not found to be satisfactory, departmental disciplinary action will be taken against him.

## **Section 25: Time to extend for investigation in certain cases**

(1) The failure of the police officer to conclude investigation within the further extended time under subsection (3) of section 25/24, on account of failure to disclose the identity of the offender in the FIR and to detect the offender, shall not be deemed to be a bar to the submission of the police report or a fresh or further police report at any subsequent time beyond the aforesaid further extended time.

(2) The failure of the police officer to conclude investigation within the further extended time under subsection 3 of section 25/24 on account of failure of any medical, forensic, fingerprint, chemical or any other expert witness, to provide to him any report or evidence relating to the offence, on whom he does not have any control and without which he can not make any effective report in respect of the case, shall not be deemed to be a bar to the submission of the police report beyond the aforesaid further extended time.

## **Section 26: Remand**

(1) Where a person is arrested and detained for investigation, the investigation officer may apply to the competent Magistrate for remand of the accused to police custody.

(2) The Magistrate may allow remand as sought under sub-section (1) for a period not exceeding at a time or in total thirty days; Provided that the Magistrate may extend the period not exceeding five days, if the investigation officer can satisfactorily prove that further evidence may be available by such further remand of the accused.

## **Chapter 6** **Trial by Sessions Judge**

### **Section 27: Session Judges or additional Session Judges to try the offences**

(1) Notwithstanding anything contained in the Code or any other law for the time being in force, so long as Special Tribunal is not established for the purpose, the offences under this ordinance shall be tried by the Sessions Judge or by an Additional Sessions Judge when transferred to him by the Sessions Judge.

(2) While trying an offence under this ordinance a Sessions Judge or an Additional Sessions Judge shall follow the procedures laid down in chapter XXIII of the Code for Trial of Offences before the Courts of Sessions.

(3) For the purpose of this Chapter, offences under this ordinance shall be deemed to be offences triable by the Court of Sessions, and proceedings in respect of such an offence alleged to have been committed by any person may be taken before the Sessions Judge within the jurisdiction of whose sessions division the offence or any part thereof was committed.

## **Chapter 7** **Trial by Special Tribunal**

### **Section 28: Establishment of Anti-Terrorism Special Tribunal**



(1) The Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, establish one or more Anti-Terrorism Special Tribunals for effective and speedy trial of offences under this ordinance.

(2) A special Tribunal established under sub-section (1) shall consist of a Sessions Judge or an Additional Sessions Judge to be appointed therein by the Government in consultation with the Supreme Court; and a Judge, so appointed, shall be designated as “Judge, Anti-Terrorism Special Tribunal”.

(3) A Special Tribunal established under this section may be assigned territorial jurisdiction for the whole of Bangladesh, or any part thereof consisting of one or more sessions division; and shall try only such cases involving offences punishable under this ordinance as shall be filled in or transferred to it for trial.

(4) On account of the Government’s assigning to a Special Tribunal the territorial jurisdiction for the whole of Bangladesh, or any part thereof consisting of one or more sessions divisions, a Sessions Judge or Additional Sessions Judge of that territorial jurisdiction shall not cease to have jurisdiction in respect of trial of offences under this ordinance, pending cases shall not be transferred to such Special Tribunal according to territorial jurisdiction, unless Government, by order notified in the official Gazette so directs.

(5) There shall not be any bar for a Special Tribunal, unless it otherwise decides, to recall or rehear any witness whose evidence has already been recorded or to reopen proceedings already held under subsection (4), but may act on the evidence already recorded or produced and continue the trial from the stage the case has reached.

(6) A special Tribunal may sit and conduct proceedings at such times and places as the Government may, by order, specify in that behalf.

### **Section 29: Procedure of Special Tribunal**

(1) A Special Tribunal shall not take cognizance of any offence except on a report in writing made by a police officer not below the rank of Sub-Inspector.

(2) Special Tribunal trying an offence under this Ordinance shall follow the procedure laid down in Chapter- XXIII of the Code for trial of offences before the Courts of Sessions, subject , however , to not being consistent with the special provisions of this Ordinance.



(3) A Special Tribunal shall not adjourn any trial unless such adjournment is necessary in the interest of justice and for reasons to be recorded in writing.

(4) Where a special tribunal has reasons to believe that an accused person has absconded or is concealing himself so that he can not be arrested and produced before it for trial and there is no immediate prospect of arresting him, it shall, by order published in at least two Bengali Daily newspapers having wide circulation, direct such person to appear before it within such period as may be specified in the order, and if such person fails to comply with such direction, he shall be tried in his absence.

(5) Where in case after the appearance of an accused person before the Special Tribunal, or his release on bail, the accused person absconds or fail to appear before it, the procedure, as laid down in subsection (4) shall not apply and the Tribunal shall , after recording its decision , try such person in his absence.

(6) A Special Tribunal may, on an application made to it, or of its own motion, direct a police officer to make further investigation in any case relating to an offence under this Ordinance and report within such time as may be specified by it.

### **Section 30: Application of the Code to proceedings of Special Tribunals**

(1) The provisions of the Code, so far as they are not inconsistent with the provisions of this Ordinance, shall apply to the proceedings of Special Tribunals, and such Special Tribunals shall have all the powers conferred by the Code on a Court of Session exercising original jurisdiction,

(2) The person conducting prosecution on behalf of the Government before the Special Tribunal shall be deemed to be a public prosecutor.

### **Section 31: Appeal and approval of death sentences**

(1) An Appeal from any order, judgment or sentence passed by a Special Tribunal may be preferred to High Court Division within thirty days from the date of delivery or passing thereof.

(2) Where a death sentence is passed under this Ordinance by a Special Tribunal, the proceedings shall be submitted forthwith to the High Court

Division and the sentence shall not be executed unless it is approved by that Division.

### **Section 32: Provision regarding bail**

No person accused of an offence punishable under this Ordinance shall be granted bail by a Magistrate or a Judge, unless:

- (a) Public prosecutor has the opportunity of being heard in respect of bail order.
- (b) The Judge is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for believing that the accused may not be found guilty of the offence at the trial and records in writing his reasons of the grounds for being so satisfied.

### **Section 33: Time limit fixed for disposal of cases by Special Tribunal**

- (1) A Judge of a Special Tribunal shall conclude the trial of a case within six months from the date on which charge is framed in respect of the case.
- (2) If the Judge fails to conclude the trial within the time specified in sub-section (1), he may, for reasons to be recorded in writing, extend the time not exceeding three months.
- (3) If the Judge fails to conclude the trial within the time specified in sub-section (2), he may, after informing the High Court Division and the Government in writing as to the reasons for such failure, further extend the time not exceeding three months.

### **Section 34: Holding of proceeds of terrorist acts**

- (1) No person shall hold, or be in possession of, any proceeds of any proceeds of terrorist acts.
  - (2) Proceeds of terrorist acts, whether held by a terrorist or by any other person and whether or not such person is prosecuted or convicted under this ordinance, shall be liable to be forfeited in favour of the Government.
- Explanation—Proceeds of terrorist acts means any money, property or assets earned or obtained/derived through commission of any offence under this Ordinance.

### **Section 35: Forfeiture of proceeds of terrorist acts**

Where any property is seized or attached on the ground that it constitutes proceeds of terrorist acts and the Judge is satisfied in this regard, he may order forfeiture of such property, whether or not the person from whose possession it is seized or attached, is prosecuted under this Ordinance.

### **Section 36: Issue of show cause notice before forfeiture of proceeds of terrorism**

(1) No order of forfeiture of proceeds of terrorist activities/acts shall be made unless , before forfeiture, the person holding, or in possession of such proceeds is given a notice in writing informing him of the reasons of such forfeiture and such person is given an opportunity of making a representation in writing within such time as may be specified in the notice against the grounds of forfeiture and is also given a reasonable opportunity of being heard in the matter.

(2) No order of forfeiture shall be made under sub-section (1), if such person can establish that he had knowledge of those property representing proceeds of terrorist acts and that he has bought it for appropriate value.

### **Section 37: Appeal**

(1) Any person aggrieved by an order of forfeiture under section 35 may, prefer appeal to the High Court Division within a month from the date of the receipt of such order.

(2) Where an order under section 35 is modified or annulled by the High Court Division or wherein a prosecution instituted for the contravention of the provisions of this Ordinance, the person against whom an order of forfeiture has been made under section 35 is acquitted, such property shall be returned to him, and if it is not possible for any reason to return the forfeited property, such person shall be paid the price thereof as if the property had been sold to the Government with reasonable interest calculated from the day of seizure of the property and such price shall be determined reasonably.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Mutual Legal Assistance**

#### **Section 38: Mutual legal assistance**

(1) When a terrorist act is committed, abetted, attempted, conspired or financed in such a manner that the territory of foreign state is involved, or the terrorist act is so committed, abetted, attempted, conspired or financed in Bangladesh from another sovereign state or from Bangladesh in another sovereign state, the Government of Bangladesh shall, upon satisfaction, render all such necessary legal assistance in connection with criminal investigation, trial or extradition as may be requested by the Government of that foreign state in respect of the following provisions of this section.

(2) The terms and conditions of mutual legal assistance to be rendered shall be mutually agreed upon between the requesting and the requested states on the basis of reciprocity through signing of formal agreement or exchange of letters.

(3) Nothing in this section shall be deemed to authorize to hand over a national of Bangladesh accused for an offence under this Ordinance to a foreign state for trial.

(4) To meet the objectives of mutual legal assistance under this section a Bangladeshi national may be, subject to his consent, handed over to a foreign state to render assistance as a witness in a relevant criminal prosecution or in the process of investigation.

(5) Bangladesh being a requested country, may refuse to comply with a request for extradition or mutual legal assistance in a particular case, if the Government has substantial grounds to believe that the request for extradition of any offender or mutual legal assistance with respect to any offence has been made under this section for the purpose of prosecuting or punishing that person only on account of his/her race, religion, nationality, or political opinion.

## **Chapter 10**

### **General Provisions**

#### **Section 39:**

(1) Offences to be cognizable and non-bail able; All offences under this Ordinance shall be cognizable.

(2) All offences under this Ordinance shall be non-bail able.

#### **Section 40: Inevitability of prior approval regarding investigation and trial**

(1) No police officer shall investigate any offence under this Ordinance without prior approval of District Magistrate

(2) No Court shall take any offence under this Ordinance into cognizance without Government sanction.

#### **Section 41: Transfer of cases to and from Special Tribunal**

The Government may, at any stage of trial before closure of evidence, transfer any case or cases involving any offence under this Ordinance from a Court of Sessions to a Special Tribunal or from a Special Tribunal to a Court of Sessions on reasonable grounds.

#### **Section 42: Power to amend the scheduled**

The Government may, by order notified in the Official Gazette, amend the schedule to this Ordinance.

#### **Section 43: Power to make rules**

To meet the objectives of this ordinance the Government may, by notification in the official Gazette, make rules.

#### **Section 44: Main Text and its English Version**

The main Text of this Ordinance shall be the Bangla Text, and there will be an authentic English version, provided that if any conflict arises between Bangla ordinance and its English text the Bangla text shall get priority.

## APPENDIX B



Report on

### **Vulnerable Population Survey II**

**Rajshahi Division**

*Submitted To:*

Information Support Team

**US Embassy, Bangladesh**

*Submitted By:*

**The Nielsen Company (Bangladesh) Ltd.**

**March 2011**



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**Report on**  
**Vulnerable Population Survey II – Rajshahi Division**

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## ABBREVIATION AND GLOSSARY

### Abbreviation

ASA	Association for Social Advancement
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (Now known as BRAC)
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
FI	Field Investigator
FC	Field Controller
FS	Field Supervisor
HSC	Higher Secondary Certificate
IST	Information Support Team
NGO	Non governmental Organization
PSU	Primary Sampling Unit
SEC	Socio Economic Classifications
SSC	Secondary School Certificate
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
VPS II	Vulnerable Population Survey II

### Glossary

**Mouza:** A revenue village with a jurisdiction list number and defined area is called mouza. It may be populated or depopulated.

**Village:** Smallest geographic area of rural area which is known to the people as village. A village may be same as mouza or there may be more than one village in a mouza. A village is always populated.

**Union:** Smallest electoral unit of rural area which is comprised of mouzas and villages is known as union. A union has a parishad (council).

**Mohallah:** Smallest identifiable area of municipalities which is known to the inhabitants as mohallah. For statistical purposes mohallahs are delineated within ward.

**Ward:** Smallest electoral unit of urban area which is comprised of mouzas and villages is known as union. A union has a parishad (council).

**Upazila:** The districts of Bangladesh are divided into subdistricts called Upazila Parishad (UZP), or Thana. The upazilas are the second lowest tier of administrative government in Bangladesh. The administrative structure consists of Divisions, Districts, Upazila/Thana and Union Parishads (UPs). There are 7 administrative divisions, 64 districts, 481 Upazillas and 4,498 unions (source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2009)

**PSU:** First stage of sampling. PSU is main source of sample such as from where the data is collected/ basic source of data.



## BACKGROUND

The Vulnerable Population Survey II (VPS-II) was conducted among 11,700 respondents from Rajshahi region, the northern part of the country. The study basically attempted to capture the perception of the population.

**Purpose of the survey:** The purpose of the survey was to identify the population groups in Rajshahi, Bangladesh those were vulnerable to socio-economic and political context of the country. The specific objectives of survey were to understand the perception of the people on current economic trend, political situation, law and order situation, safety and security of the community, trust on state run institutes, social justice and moral values.

**Salient findings:** The survey found the people of the northern Bangladesh are divided equally over the opinion on how the country has progressed over the last two years with 8% being indifferent. There is a mixed perception among the citizen regarding the changes of the overall condition of the country during last two years. 44% of the people think that the situation is better now, whereas 48% people believe that it has become worse.

However, people find unacceptable mostly the distribution gap of income between the rich and poor. That is followed by job employment opportunities and discrimination in our society. People are in favor of changes in the society. They see their voting powers as the most effective tool to bring about any changes. Voting in elections was found to be a very effective activity in bringing about change. Participating in civic and charitable projects, joining peaceful groups promoting change and protesting also scored high in effectiveness to bring about change.

According to the respondents, with a view to maintaining law and order situation, the people have high confidence on the armed forces (71%). The local community leaders and police need to work harder to gain the confidence of the people. The people of the country have a positive perception (68%) on obeying all the laws set by the current government and most are pleased with the current government activities. The people are also highly optimistic with the future of this country (79%).

Overall, majority of the people (74%) are happy with their surrounding conditions and also felt they are better off in their local conditions when compared to the rest of the country. Less than a quarter of the people had knowledge of anyone in their locality as a victim of violence or physical threat and over one third reported that there were frequent incidence of violence in their locality.

Majority of the people (81%) felt that the security provided by the government and national security forces is effective but nearly all of them had perception that the security forces are corrupt. However, an overwhelming majority of the people (93%) said that their local security forces block activities of the militants and take a hard line against the militants.

There is mixed feeling among the people regarding the moral level of the people of their locality with nearly 50% saying that most of the people are moral. They consider religion to be a very important part of their lives. Over 75% of the people mentioned that they have suffered greatly from discrimination. The majority feels that people who share the same religious beliefs as themselves are fairly treated. But over 12% disagreed with the

statement, indicating the religious minorities including the smaller sects in Islam may feel discriminated. However, majority of the people had opined for severe punishment for corrupt officials with over 50% asking for imprisonment and wealth confiscation of the corrupt officials and 21% even demanding death penalty for serious corruption.

Bangladeshis in general peace-loving and are usually against any violence. They also believe peaceful ways as an effective way to bring necessary changes in their lives and societies.



## METHODOLOGY

### DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUE

The survey was quantitative in nature and was conducted among 11,700 respondents of age 18 years and above, through face to face interviews. The respondents were both females and males of equal proportion.

### GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE

The study covered locations pre-selected by the representatives from IST, US Embassy; as follows:

#### Rajshahi Division

- Chapai Nawabganj District
- Naogaon District
- Joypurhat District
- Bogra District
- Rajshahi District
- Natore District
- Sirajganj District
- Pabna District

### SAMPLE DISTRIBUTION

Face to face interviews were conducted among urban and rural dwellers of vulnerable population. Sample size and district was selected by IST, US Embassy, Bangladesh.

Area	Total
Chapai Nawabganj	1600
Naogaon	1600
Joypurhat	1000
Bogra	1500
Rajshahi	2000
Natore	1000
Sirajganj	1500
Pabna	1500
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,700</b>

### SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

A 3-stage cluster sampling method was followed in this study. In rural areas for the ease of operation three stages include district, upazila and mouza. In urban areas, the stages were municipality, ward, and mohallah.

#### Selection of upazila: Area Selection

From each district 2-3 upazilas were selected randomly to capture the rural sample. Mouza were considered as rural PSU and were randomly selected from the selected upazilas of each district using the list of mouza available with Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). Similarly, mohallas (urban PSUs) were randomly selected from the list available with BBS.

### **Selection of Household**

- After selection of PSU's it was divided into two or three segments. Each segment was constituted of about 100 households. From there, one segment was selected randomly.
- The field team selected an appropriate spot/landmark for interview from the selected segment which acted as a starting point.
- The first sample/household was selected through simple random procedure.
- For every successful interview, alternate houses were chosen for interviewing. However, in cases of unsuccessful interviews, the adjoining household was chosen.
- In every selected household, one eligible respondent was interviewed.

### **Respondent Selection**

Once the household was chosen, any household member who was over 18 years of age was automatically qualified as a potential respondent. In case of a household having more than one qualified respondent, the interviewer assigned a number to each qualified respondents. Then the interviewer randomly drew a number and the respondent corresponding to the number selected was interviewed.

### **Survey Preparation**

Nielsen was responsible for training and supervising the interviewers to ensure a high quality of responses. During training of the field personnel, all project locations were identified so that each specific team and their supervisor know exactly their areas of operation up to sub-location level.

Required number of field personnel for the study was recruited from Nielsen panel of experienced Field Interviewers (FI) and Field Supervisors (FS). After preliminary selection, the FI's, FS's and Field Controllers (FC, permanent field executives) attended a training/briefing session, which includes data collection mechanism, art of data collection, briefing on the questionnaire, right/left hand rule, etc. The interviewers were at least graduates and had previous experience of conducting similar surveys.

After the preliminary training FI's and FS's went to the field and completed two sets of questionnaires. This gave them a practical knowledge about the whole process. Before final selection, they faced a "mock test" the whole procedure. Final selection of FI's and FS's were done on the basis of the practice interview and mock test results. Second round of briefing were done after final selection.

### **Quality Control Mechanism**

Nielsen Bangladesh has always been quality conscious, and as a guiding principle 'Quality Control at all levels' is the basic policy of the company. Especially at the stage of research designing, data collection and analysis Nielsen maintains the uppermost quality at all levels. However, Nielsen follows the Market Research Society - MRS (UK) and Nielsen code of conduct as a basic guideline in all the aspects of marketing and social

research. Only employing interviewers with adequate experience is one of the norms of the operational policy of Nielsen. Adequate records are kept in a computerized database about each individual to track him or her for maintaining field management standards. Moreover, checking procedure is even more rigid. All filled in questionnaires (100%) are scrutinized. Usually 35% of all completed interviews are randomly back-checked by Field Controllers, Data Quality Controllers, Field Managers and Researchers.

A Central Control Room functioned at our Dhaka Office, which was managed by the Field Manager and in his absence by a Senior Field Executive. The team reported their daily progress as well as any other information to the Control Room. Any suggestions / instructions to teams were also relayed through the Control Room and recorded in the Logbook.

#### **Ethical Issues**

**Confidentiality and Privacy:** The respondents were informed clearly that the information they provide during the interviews will be kept strictly confidential. Only the interviewer and the researcher will have access to the questionnaires and this information will be destroyed on completion of the study.

Furthermore, privacy during the interview process was safeguarded. The interviews were held under conditions wherein the respondents were most comfortable in responding.

#### **Survey Period**

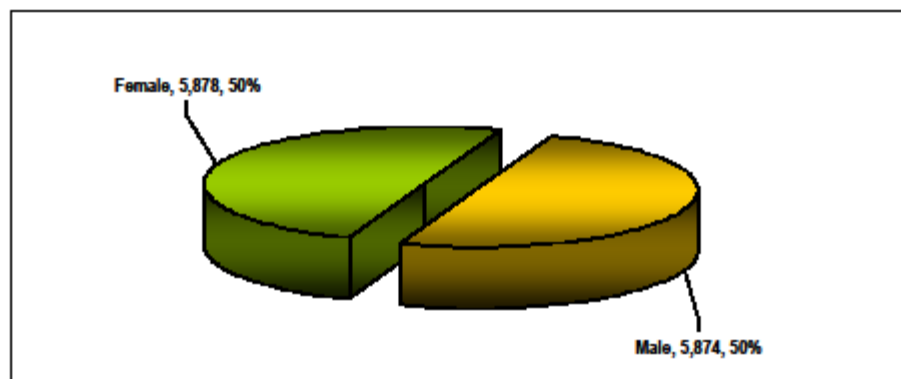
January 18, 2011 – February 9, 2011



## FINDINGS OF THE SURVEY

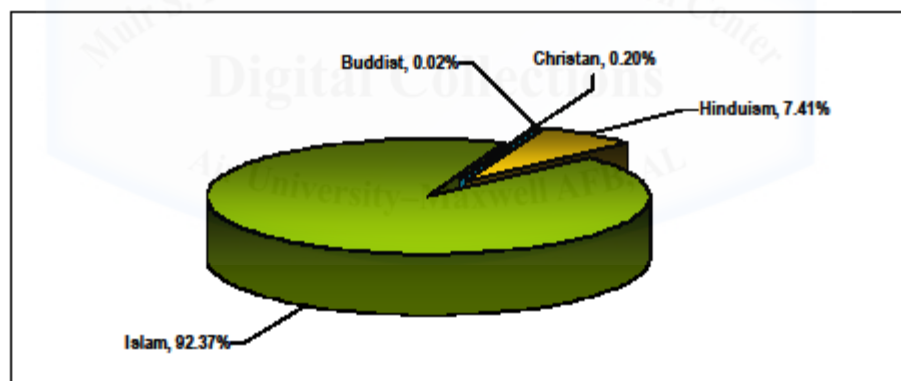
### 1. DEMOGRAPHICS

#### 1.1 Respondent Gender



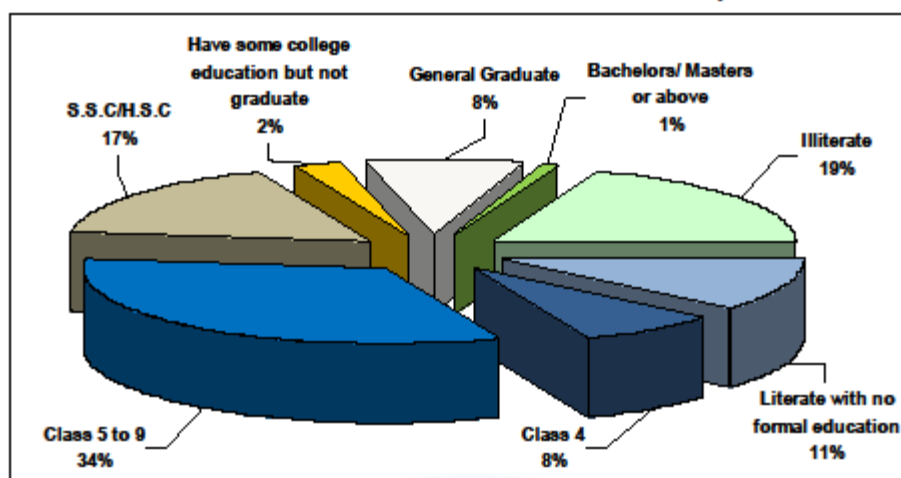
Male and female respondents were nearly equal in numbers.

#### 1.2 Respondent's Religion



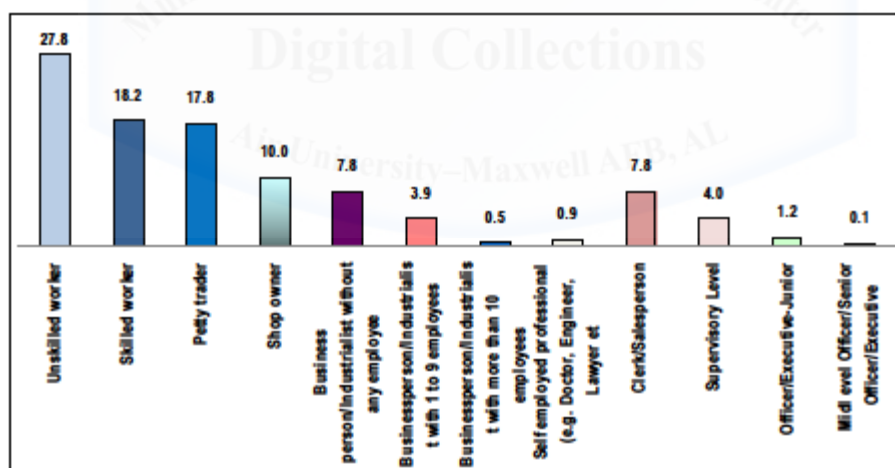
92% of the respondents belonged to Islamic faith, 7.4% to the Hindu faith and the remaining to Buddhism and Christianity.

### 1.3 Education Level of the Chief Household Earner of the Family



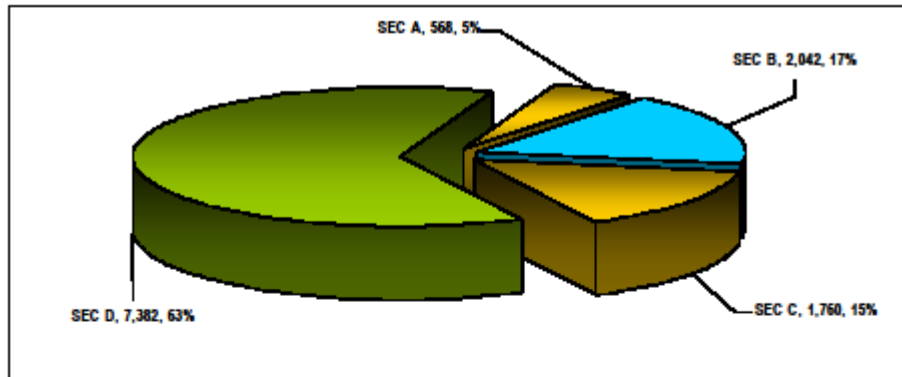
Most of the respondent's family's chief household earner did not pass SSC/HSC and nearly 20% were illiterate.

### 1.4 Occupation Level of the Chief Household Earner of the Family



37% of the chief household earners of the respondents' family are unskilled worker.

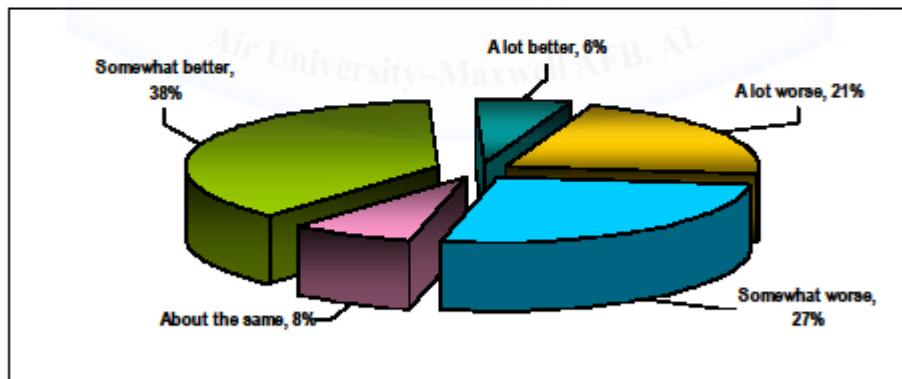
### 1.5 SEC of the Respondents



SEC D comprised 63% of the respondents.  
SEC B comprised 17% of the respondents.  
SEC C comprised 15% of the respondents.  
And SEC A comprised 5% of the respondents

## 2. OVERALL CONDITION OF THE COUNTRY

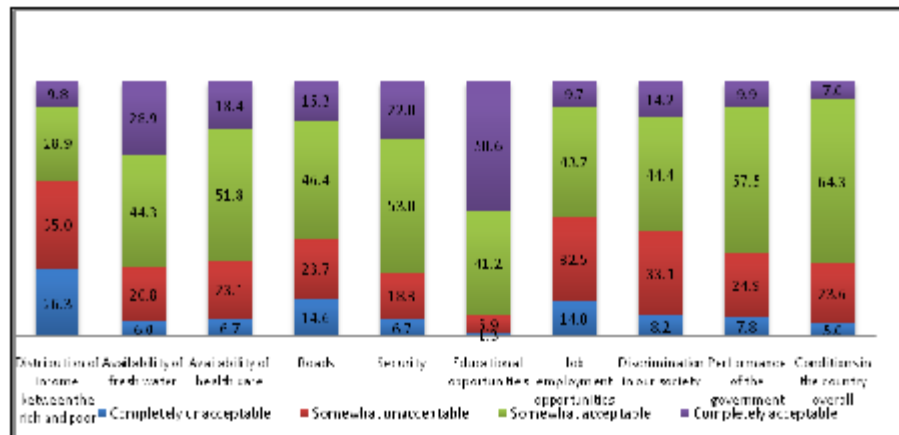
### 2.1 Perception on Changing the Overall Condition of the Country during the Last Two Years



There is a mixed perception among the citizen regarding the changes of the overall condition of the country during last two years. 44% of the people think that the situation is better now, whereas 48% people believe that it has become worse.

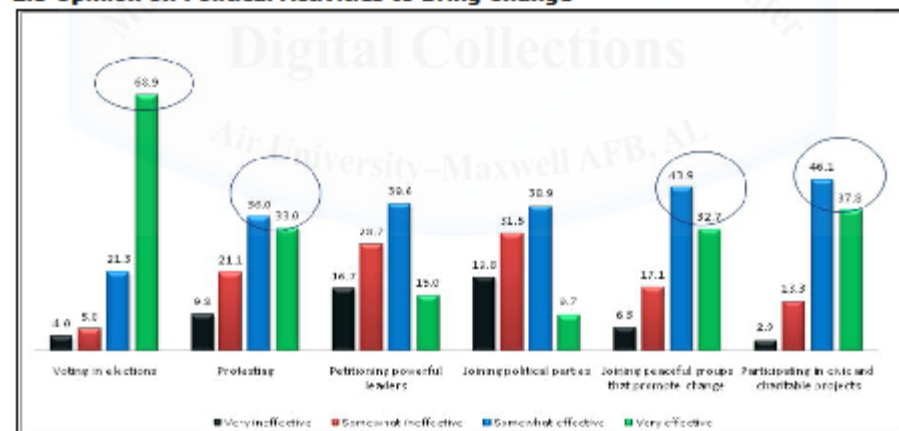


## 2.2 Acceptance of the Common Concerns about the Country



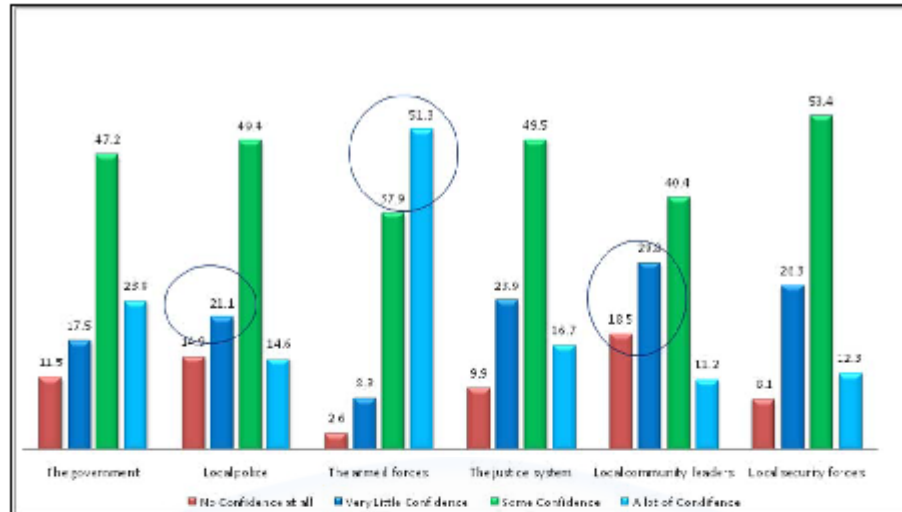
People find unacceptable mostly the distribution gap of income between the rich and poor. That is followed by job employment opportunities and discrimination in our society.

## 2.3 Opinion on Political Activities to Bring Change



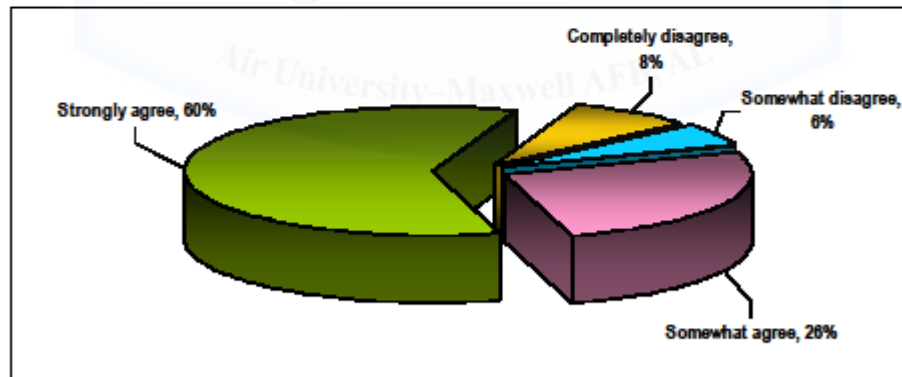
Voting in elections was found to be a very effective activity in bringing about change. Participating in civic and charitable projects, joining peaceful groups promoting change and protesting also scored high in effectiveness to bring about change.

#### 2.4 Trust on Institutes to Maintain Law and Order



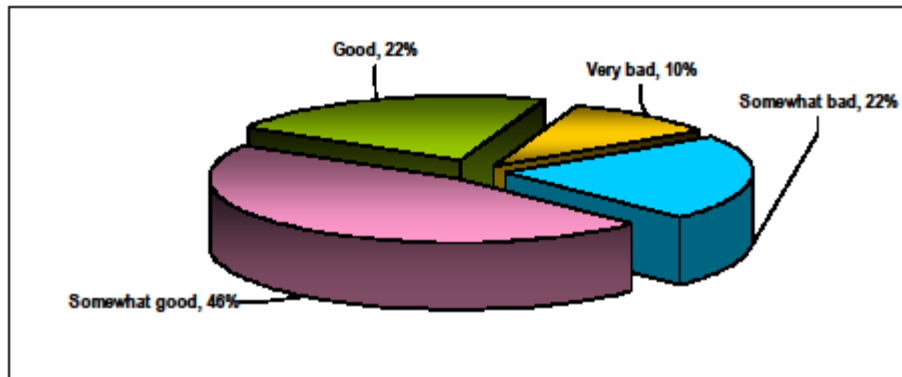
The citizens of the country have very high confidence on the armed forces to maintain the law and order. But the local community leaders and police need to work harder to gain the confidence of the people.

#### 2.5 Perception on Obeying the Laws of the Current Government



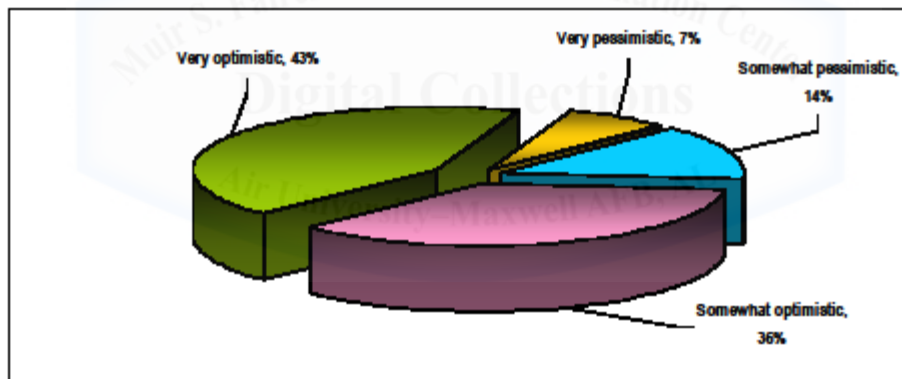
Overall the people of this country have a positive perception on obeying all the laws set by the current government.

## 2.6 Perception Regarding the Current Government Activities



Overall, people are somewhat pleased with the current government activities.

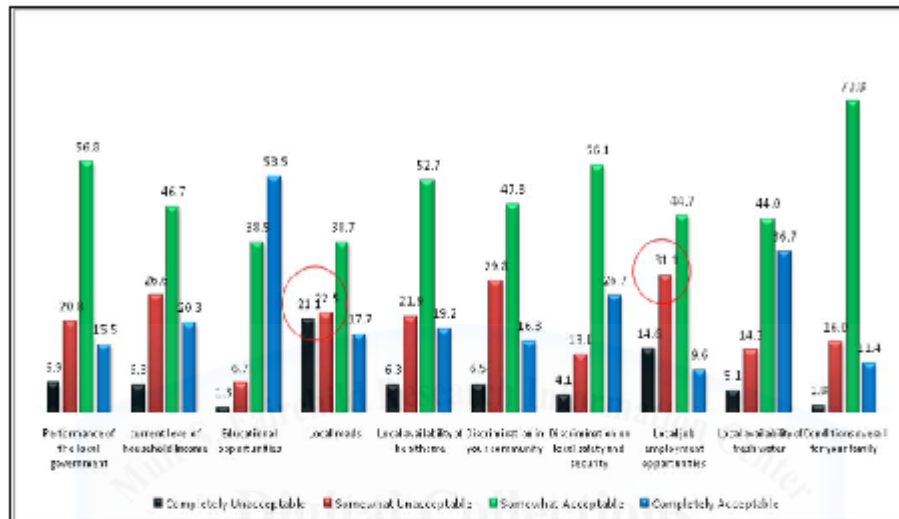
## 2.7 Perception on the Future of the Country



Most of the people are optimistic with the future of this country

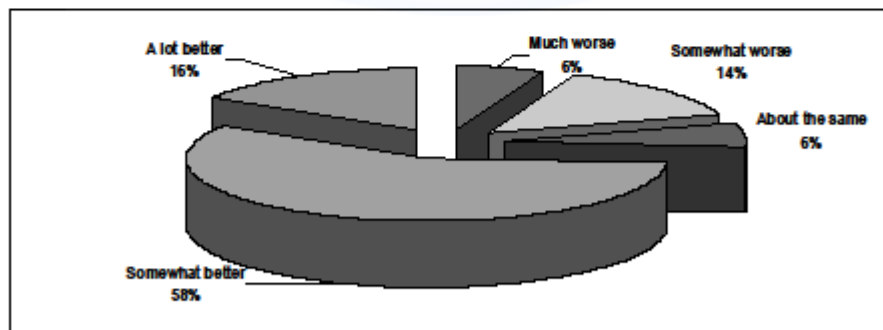
### 3. SECURITY OF THE COMMUNITY

#### 3.1 Acceptance of the Local Conditions



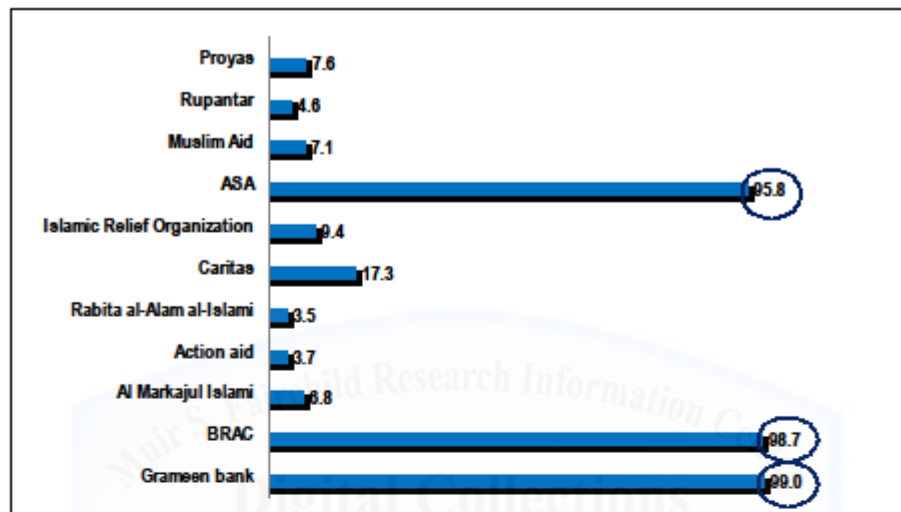
Overall people are somewhat happy with their surrounding conditions. But a significant number of people are not very happy with the local roads and the job employment opportunities in the society. They were most satisfied with the educational opportunities.

#### 3.2 Perception of the Local Conditions in Comparison to the Rest of the Country



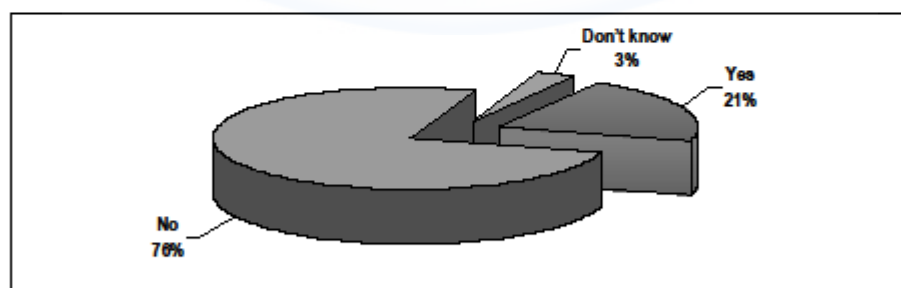
Most people feel they are better off with their local conditions when compared to the rest of the country.

### 3.3 Awareness about the different NGOs



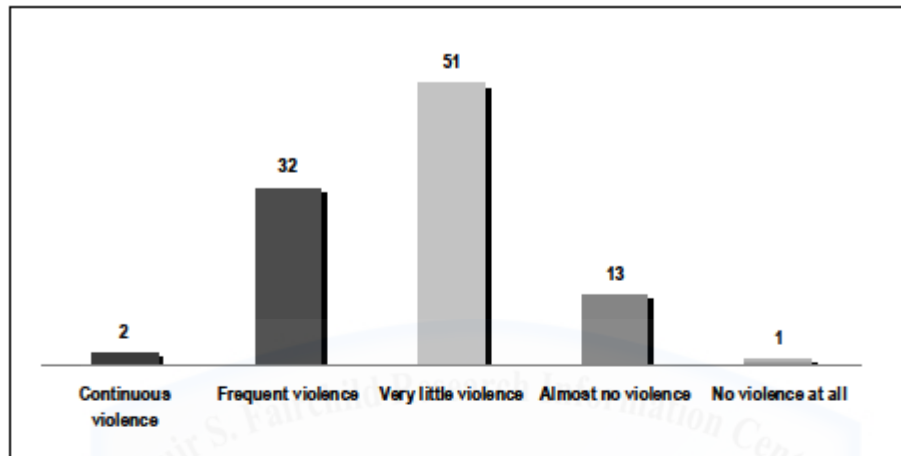
Only 3 NGOs namely, Grameen Bank, BRAC and ASA had high awareness among the people as nearly all knew about them.

### 3.4 Perception on Occurrence of Violence in the Community



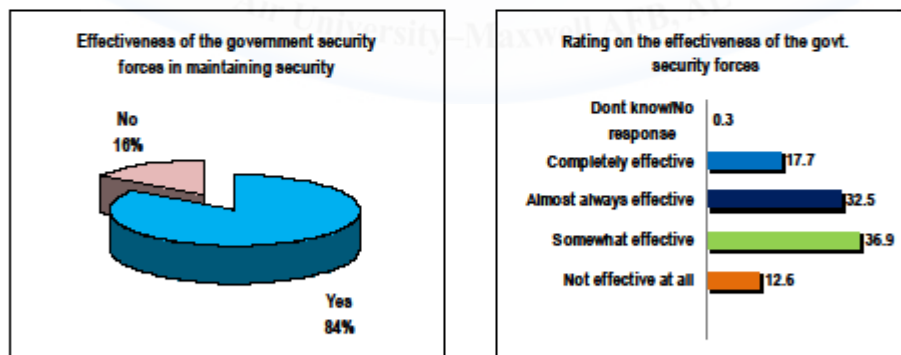
Most people said that they did not know of any occurrence of violence or handing down of physical threat to anyone in their locality

### 3.5 Perception on Frequency of the Violence



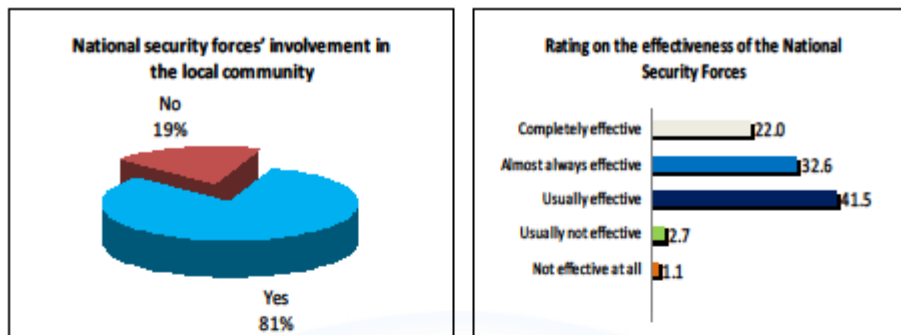
Nearly 34% of the respondents mentioned that there were continuous or frequent violence taking place in their locality

### 3.6 Effectiveness of the Government Security Forces in Maintaining Security



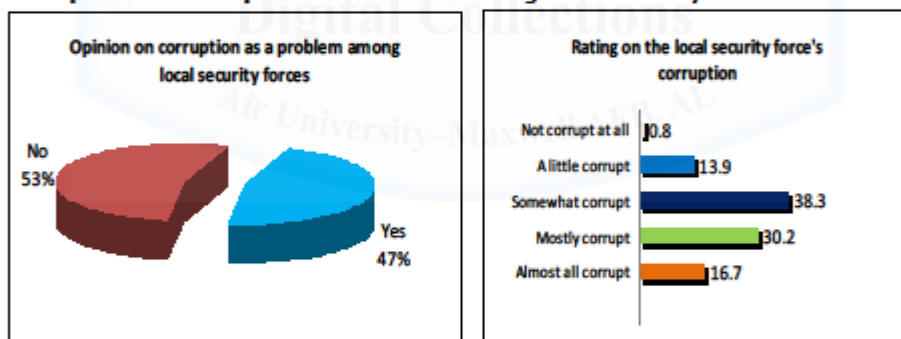
Most of the people believe that the local government security forces are effective in maintaining security. But among them around 37% people are not very confident about the effectiveness of the govt. security forces.

### 3.7 National Security Forces' Involvement in the Local Community



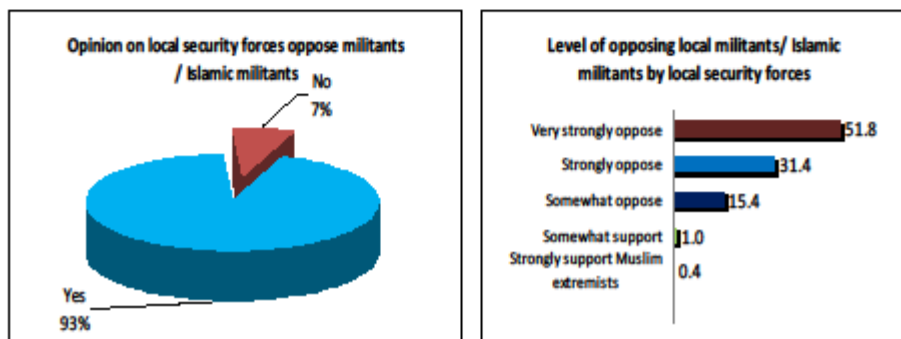
Majority (81%) people believe that the National Security Forces provide security in their locality and again an overwhelming majority from them said that it is nearly always effective.

### 3.8 Opinion on Corruption as a Problem among Local Security Forces



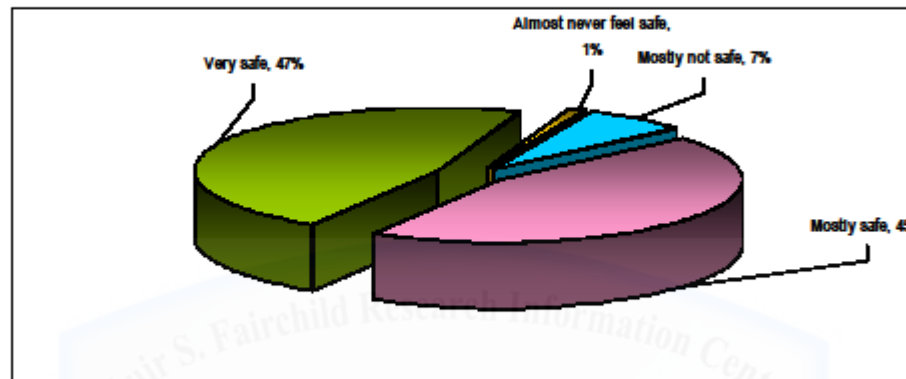
People are nearly equally divided over the fact whether corruption is a problem in the local security forces. But nearly all said that the security forces are corrupt.

### 3.9 Opinion on Local Security Forces Oppose Militants/Islamic Militants



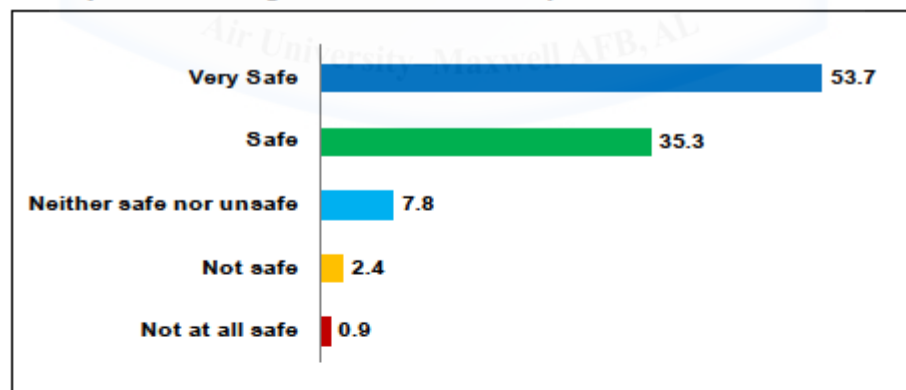
An overwhelming majority of the people said that their local security forces block activities of the militants and take a hard line against the militants.

### 3.10 Opinion on Feeling Safe in the Local Area



Majority people felt safe in their locality

### 3.11 Opinion on Feeling Safe with Local Security Force



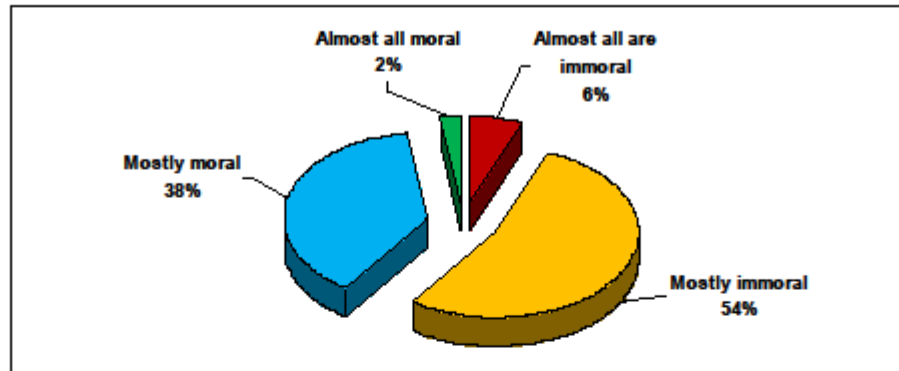
Nearly 90% of the people said that they feel safe in the presence of local security force.





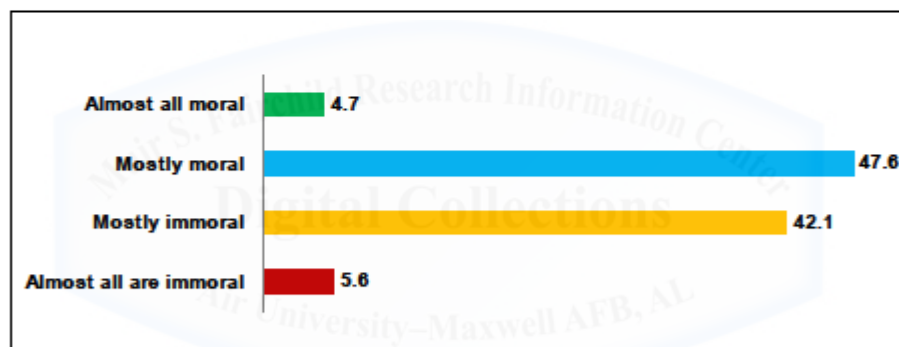
#### 4. SOCIAL JUSTICE AND MORAL VALUES

##### 4.1 Opinion on Morality Level among People of Bangladesh



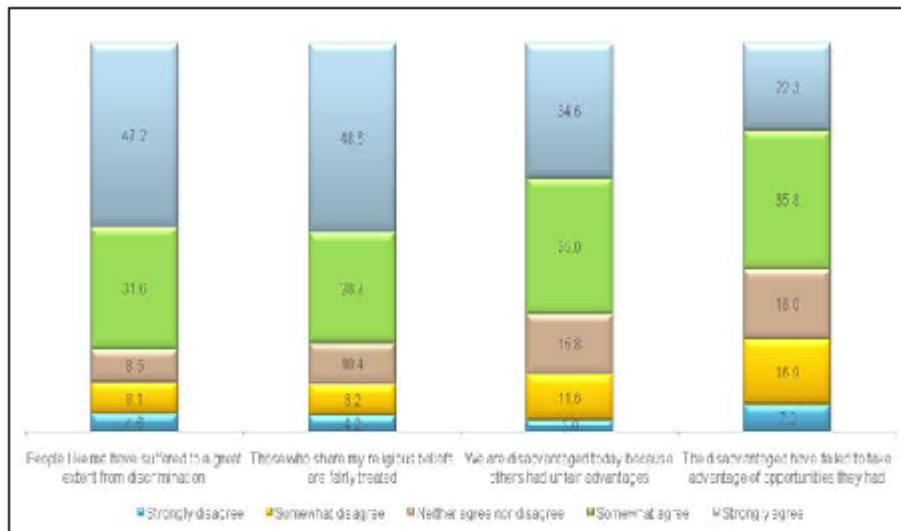
There is mixed feeling among the people regarding the moral level of the people of the country but nearly 60% of the respondents feel that the people are mostly immoral.

##### 4.2 Opinion on Morality Level among Local Community People



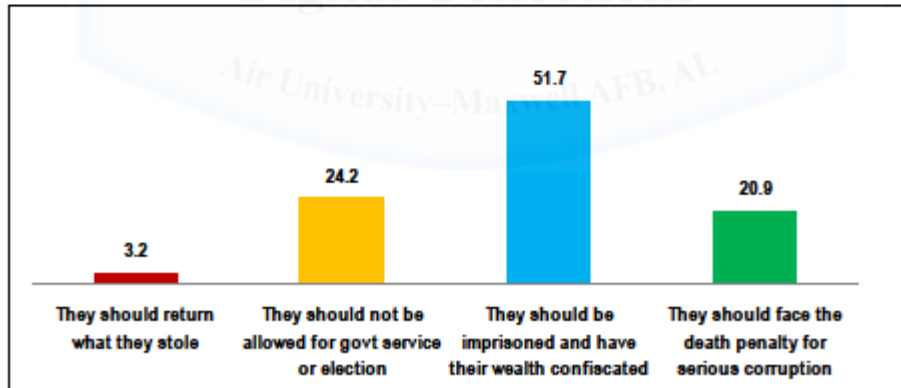
There is mixed feeling among the people regarding the moral level of the people of their locality with nearly 50% saying that most of the people are moral.

#### 4.3 Opinion on Groups that have been Disadvantaged



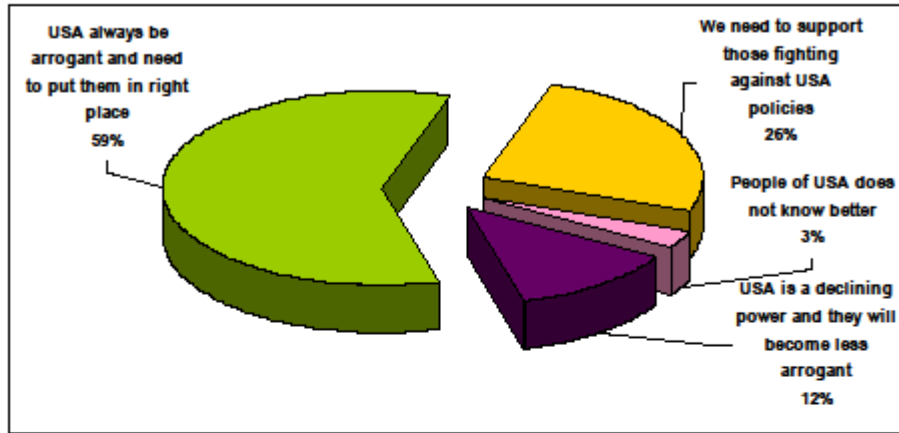
- Over 75% of the people they have suffered greatly from discrimination.
- The majority feels that people who share the same religious beliefs as themselves are fairly treated. But over 12% disagreed with the statement, indicating the religious minorities including the smaller sects in Islam may feel discriminated.
- Around 70% of the people said they felt disadvantaged because others had received unfair advantages.
- Nearly 60% of the people feel that the disadvantaged lost out on grabbing the opportunities presented to them.

#### 4.4 Opinion about Most Appropriate Punishment for Corrupt Officials



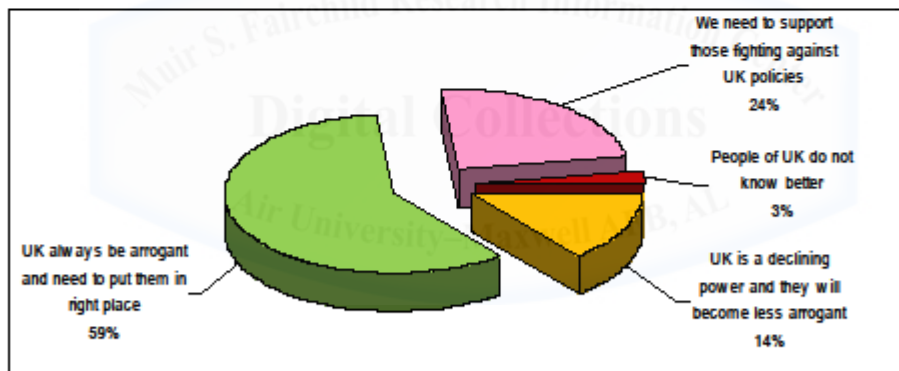
Majority of the people had opined for severe punishment for corrupt officials with over 50% asking for imprisonment and wealth confiscation of the corrupt officials and 21% even demanding death penalty for serious corruption.

#### 4.5 Opinion about United States



A majority of the people, nearly 60% believe that the US is arrogant and they ought to be treated a lesson. Another 25% opined to the extreme end to support those fighting against US policies.

#### 4.6 Opinion about United Kingdom



A majority of the people, nearly 60% believe that the UK is arrogant and they ought to be treated a lesson. Another 24% opined to the extreme end to support those fighting against UK policies.

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